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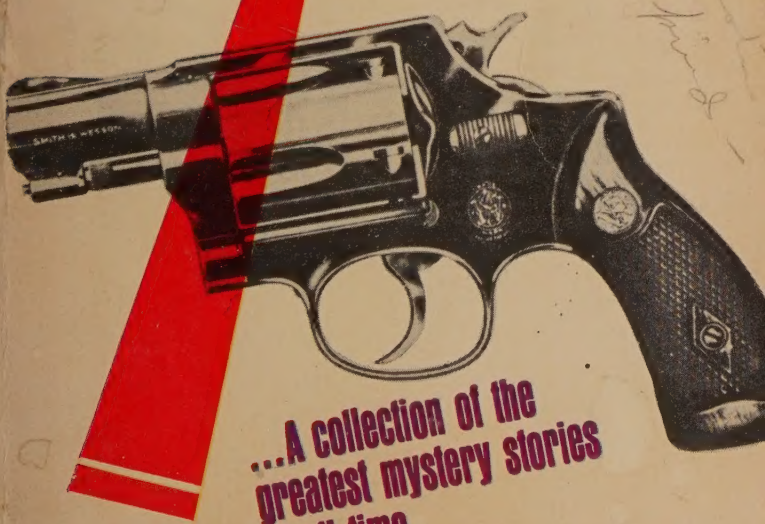
Selected and Introduced by

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

TALES OF DETECTION AND MYSTERY

from THE OMNIBUS OF CRIME



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TALES OF DETECTION AND MYSTERY

from "THE OMNIBUS OF CRIME"

Edited by
DOROTHY L. SAYERS

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A MACFADDEN BOOK

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INTRODUCTION

THE ART OF self-tormenting is an ancient one, with a long and honourable literary tradition. Man, not satisfied with the mental confusion and unhappiness to be derived from contemplating the cruelties of life and the riddle of the universe, delights to occupy his leisure moments with puzzles and bugaboos. The pages of every magazine and newspaper swarm with cross-words, mathematical tricks, puzzle-pictures, enigmas, acrostics, and detective-stories, as also with stories of the kind called "powerful" (which means unpleasant), and those which make him afraid to go to bed. It may be that in them he finds a sort of catharsis or purging of his fears and self-questionings. These mysteries made only to be solved, these horrors which he knows to be mere figments of the creative brain, comfort him by subtly persuading that life is a mystery which death will solve, and whose horrors will pass away as a tale that is told. Or it may be merely that his animal faculties of fear and inquisitiveness demand more exercise than the daily round affords. Or it may be pure perversity. The fact remains that if you search the second-hand bookstalls for his cast-off literature, you will find fewer mystery stories than any other kind of book. Theology and poetry, philosophy and numismatics, love-stories and biography, he discards as easily as old razor-blades, but Sherlock Holmes and Wilkie Collins are cherished and read and re-read, till their covers fall off and their pages crumble to fragments.

Both the detective-story proper and the pure tale of horror are very ancient in origin. All native folk-lore has its ghost tales. But, whereas the tale of horror has flourished in practically every age and country, the detective-story has had a spasmodic history, appearing here and there in faint, tentative sketches and episodes, until it suddenly burst into magnificent flower in the middle of the last century.

EARLY HISTORY OF DETECTIVE FICTION

Between 1840 and 1845 the wayward genius of Edgar Allan Poe (himself a past-master of the horrible) produced five tales, in which the general principles of the detective-story were laid down for ever. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* and, with a certain repulsive facetiousness, in *Thou Art the*

Man he achieved the fusion of the two distinct genres and created what we may call the story of mystery, as distinct from pure detection on the one hand and pure horror on the other. In this fused genre, the reader's blood is first curdled by some horrible and apparently inexplicable murder or portent; the machinery of detection is then brought in to solve the mystery and punish the murderer. Since Poe's time all three branches —detection, mystery, and horror—have flourished. We have such pleasant little puzzles as Conan Doyle's *Case of Identity*, in which there is nothing to shock or horrify; we have mere fantasies of blood and terror—human, as in Conan Doyle's *The Case of Lady Sannox*,[1] or supernatural, as in Marion Crawford's *The Upper Berth*;[2] most satisfactory of all, perhaps, we have such fusions as *The Speckled Band*,[3] or *The Hammer of God*,[4] in which the ghostly terror is invoked only to be dispelled.

It is rather puzzling that the detective-story should have had to wait so long to find a serious exponent. Having started so well, why did it not develop earlier? The Oriental races, with their keen appreciation of intellectual subtlety, should surely have evolved it. The germ was there. "Why do you not come to pay your respects to me?" says Æsop's lion to the fox. "I beg your Majesty's pardon," says the fox, "but I noticed the track of the animals that have already come to you; and, while I see many hoof-marks going in, I see none coming out. Till the animals that have entered your cave come out again, I prefer to remain in the open air." Sherlock Holmes could not have reasoned more lucidly from the premises.

The Jews, with their strongly moral preoccupation, were peculiarly fitted to produce the *roman policier*. The Romans, logical and given to law-making, might have been expected to do something with it, but they did not. In one of the folk-tales collected by the Grimms, twelve maidens disguised as men are set to walk across a floor strewn with peas, in the hope that their shuffling feminine tread will betray them; the maidens are, however, warned, and baffle the detectives by treading firmly. In an Indian folk-tale a similar ruse is more successful. Here a suitor is disguised as a woman, and has to be picked out from the women about him by the wise princess. The princess throws a lemon to each in turn, and the disguised man is detected by his instinctive action in clapping his knees together to catch the lemon, whereas the real women spread their knees to catch it in their skirts. Coming down to later European literature, we find a similarly elementary method of detection reproduced in the story of Tristan. Here the king's spy spreads

[1] Conan Doyle: *Round the Red Lamp.*
[2] Marion Crawford: *Uncanny Tales.*
[3] Conan Doyle: *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes.*
[4] G. K. Chesterton: *The Innocence of Father Brown.*

flour between Tristan's bed and that of Iseult; Tristan defeats the scheme by leaping from one bed to the other. The eighteenth century also contributed at least one outstanding example, in the famous detective chapter of Voltaire's *Zadig*.

It may be, as Mr. E. M. Wrong has suggested in a brilliant little study,[5] that throughout this early period "a faulty law of evidence was to blame, for detectives cannot flourish until the public has an idea of what constitutes proof, and while a common criminal procedure is arrest, torture, confession, and death." One may go further, and say that, though crime stories might, and did, flourish, the detective-story proper could not do so until public sympathy had veered round to the side of law and order. It will be noticed that, on the whole, the tendency in early crime-literature is to admire the cunning and astuteness of the criminal.[6] This must be so while the law is arbitrary, oppressive, and brutally administered.

We may note that, even to-day, the full blossoming of the detective-stories is found among the Anglo-Saxon races. It is notorious that an English crowd tends to side with the policeman in a row. The British legal code, with its tradition of "sportsmanship" and "fair play for the criminal" is particularly favourable to the production of detective fiction, allowing, as it does, sufficient rope to the quarry to provide a ding-dong chase, rich in up-and-down incident. In France, also, though the street policeman is less honoured than in England, the detective-force is admirably organised and greatly looked up to. France has a good output of detective-stories, though considerably smaller than that of the English-speaking races. In the Southern States of Europe the law is less loved and the detective story less frequent. We may not unreasonably trace a connection here.

Some further light is thrown on the question by a remark once made by Herr Lion Feuchtwanger in a radio broadcast. Contrasting the tastes of the English, French, and German publics, he noted the great attention paid by the Englishman to the external details of men and things. The Englishman likes material exactness in the books he reads; the German and the Frenchman, in different degrees, care little for it in comparison with psychological truth. It is hardly surprising, then, that the detective-story, with its insistence on footprints, bloodstains, dates, times, and places, and its reduction of character-drawing to bold, flat outline, should appeal far more strongly to Anglo-Saxon taste than to that of France or Germany.

Taking these two factors together, we begin to see why the detective-story had to wait for its full development for the

[5] Preface to *Tales of Crime and Detection*. World's Classics. (Oxford University Press, 1924.)

[6] e.g. *The Story of Rhampsinitus; Jacob and Esau; Reynard the Fox; Ballads of Robin Hood*, etc.

establishment of an effective police organisation in the Anglo-Saxon countries. This was achieved—in England, at any rate—during the early part of the nineteenth century,[7] and was followed about the middle of that century by the first outstanding examples of the detective-story as we know it to-day.[8]

To this argument we may add another. In the nineteenth century the vast, unexplored limits of the world began to shrink at an amazing and unprecedented rate. The electric telegraph circled the globe; railways brought remote villages into touch with civilisation; photographs made known to the stay-at-homes the marvels of foreign landscapes, customs, and animals; science reduced seeming miracles to mechanical marvels; popular education and improved policing made town and country safer for the common man than they had ever been. In place of the adventurer and the knight errant, popular imagination hailed the doctor, the scientist, and the policeman as saviours and protectors. But if one could no longer hunt the manticora, one could still hunt the murderer; if the armed escort had grown less necessary, yet one still needed the analyst to frustrate the wiles of the poisoner; from this point of view, the detective steps into his right place as the protector of the weak—the latest of the popular heroes, the true successor of Roland and Lancelot.

Edgar Allan Poe: Evolution of the Detective

Before tracing further the history of detective fiction, let us look a little more closely at those five tales of Poe's, in which so much of the future development is anticipated. Probably the first thing that strikes us is that Poe has struck out at a blow the formal outline on which a large section of detective fiction has been built up. In the three Dupin stories we have the formula of the eccentric and brilliant private detective whose doings are chronicled by an admiring and thickheaded friend. From Dupin and his unnamed chronicler springs a long

[7] In a letter to W. Thornbury, dated February 18, 1862, Dickens says: "The Bow Street Runners ceased out of the land soon after the introduction of the new police. I remember them very well. . . . They kept company with thieves and such-like, much more than the detective police do. I don't know what their pay was, but I have no doubt their principal complements were got under the rose. It was a very slack institution, and its head-quarters were the Brown Bear, in Bow Street, a public house of more than doubtful reputation, opposite the police-office." The first "peelers" were established in 1829.

[8] The significance of footprints, and the necessity for scientific care in the checking of alibis, were understood at quite an early date, though, in the absence of an efficient detective police, investigations were usually carried out by private persons at the instigation of the coroner. A remarkable case, which reads like a Freeman Wills Crofts novel, was that of R. *v.* Thornton (1818).

and distinguished line: Sherlock Holmes and his Watson; Martin Hewitt and his Brett; Raffles and his Bunny (on the criminal side of the business, but of the same breed); Thorndyke and his various Jardines, Ansteys, and Jervises; Hanaud and his Mr. Ricardo; Poirot and his Captain Hastings; Philo Vance and his Van Dine. It is not surprising that this formula should have been used so largely, for it is obviously a very convenient one for the writer. For one thing, the admiring satellite may utter expressions of eulogy which would be unbecoming in the mouth of the author, gaping at his own colossal intellect. Again, the reader, even if he is not, in R. L. Stevenson's phrase, "always a man of such vastly greater ingenuity than the writer," is usually a little more ingenious than Watson. He sees a little further through the brick wall; he pierces, to some extent, the cloud of mystification with which the detective envelops himself. "Aha!" he says to himself, "the average reader is supposed to see no further than Watson. But the author has not reckoned with me. I am one too many for him." He is deluded. It is all a device of the writer's for flattering him and putting him on good terms with himself. For though the reader likes to be mystified, he also likes to say, "I told you so," and "I spotted that." And this leads us to the third great advantage of the Holmes-Watson convention: by describing the clues as presented to the dim eyes and bemused mind of Watson, the author is enabled to preserve a spurious appearance of frankness, while keeping to himself the special knowledge on which the interpretation of those clues depends. This is a question of paramount importance, involving the whole artistic ethic of the detective-story. We shall return to it later. For the moment, let us consider a few other interesting types and formulæ which make their first appearance in Poe.

The personality of Dupin is eccentric, and for several literary generations eccentricity was highly fashionable among detective heroes. Dupin, we are informed, had a habit of living behind closed shutters, illumined by "a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays." From this stronghold he issued by night, to promenade the streets and enjoy the "infinity of mental excitement" afforded by quiet observation. He was also given to startling his friends by analysing their thought-processes, and he had a rooted contempt for the methods of the police.

Sherlock Holmes modelled himself to a large extent upon Dupin, substituting cocaine for candlelight, with accompaniments of shag and fiddle-playing. He is a more human and endearing figure than Dupin, and has earned as his reward the supreme honour which literature has to bestow—the secular equivalent of canonisation. He has passed into the language.

He also started a tradition of his own—the hawk-faced tradition, which for many years dominated detective fiction.

So strong, indeed, was this domination that subsequent notable eccentrics have displayed their eccentricities chiefly by escaping from it. "Nothing," we are told, "could have been less like the traditional detective than"—so-and-so. He may be elderly and decrepit, like Baroness Orczy's Old Man in the Corner, whose characteristic habit is the continual knotting of string. Or he may be round and innocent-looking, like Father Brown or Poirot. There is Sax Rohmer's Moris Klaw,[9] with his bald, scholarly forehead; he irrigates his wits with a verbena spray, and carries about with him an "odically-sterilised" cushion to promote psychic intuition. There is the great Dr. Thorndyke, probably the handsomest detective in fiction; he is outwardly bonhomous, but spiritually detached, and his emblem is the green research-case, filled with miniature microscopes and scientific implements. Max Carrados has the distinction of being blind; Old Ebbie wears a rabbit-skin waistcoat; Lord Peter Wimsey (if I may refer to him without immodesty) indulges in the buying of incunabula and has a pretty taste in wines and haberdashery. By a final twist of the tradition, which brings the wheel full circle, there is a strong modern tendency to produce detectives remarkable for their ordinariness; they may be well-bred walking gentlemen, like A. A. Milne's Anthony Gillingham, or journalists, like Gaston Leroux's Rouletabille, or they may even be policemen, like Freeman Wills Crofts' Inspector French, or the heroes of Mr. A. J. Rees's sound and well-planned stories.[10]

There have also been a few women detectives,[11] but on the whole, they have not been very successful. In order to justify their choice of sex, they are obliged to be so irritatingly intuitive as to destroy that quiet enjoyment of the logical which we look for in our detective reading. Or else they are active and courageous, and insist on walking into physical danger and hampering the men engaged on the job. Marriage, also, looms too large in their view of life; which is not surprising, for they are all young and beautiful. Why these charming creatures should be able to tackle abstruse problems at the age of twenty-one or thereabouts, while the male detectives are usually con-

[9] Sax Rohmer: *The Dream Detective.*

[10] A. J. Rees: *The Shrieking Pit; The Hand in the Dark;* (with J. R. Watson) *The Hampstead Mystery; The Mystery of the Downs,* etc. Messrs. Rees and Watson write of police affairs with the accuracy born of inside knowledge, but commendably avoid the dullness which is apt to result from a too-faithful description of correct official procedure.

[11] e.g. Anna Katherine Green: *The Golden Slipper;* Baroness Orczy: *Lady Molly of Scotland Yard;* G. R. Sims: *Dorcas Dene;* Valentine: *The Adjusters;* Richard Marsh: *Judith Lee;* Arthur B. Reeve: *Constance Dunlop;* etc.

tent to wait till their thirties or forties before setting up as experts, it is hard to say. Where do they pick up their worldly knowledge? Not from personal experience, for they are always immaculate as the driven snow. Presumably it is all intuition.

Better use has been made of women in books where the detecting is strictly amateur—done, that is, by members of the family or house-party themselves, and not by a private consultant. Evelyn Humblethorne[12] is a detective of this kind, and so is Joan Cowper, in *The Brooklyn Murders*.[13] But the really brilliant woman detective has yet to be created.[14]

Edgar Allan Poe: Evolution of the Plot

As regards plot also, Poe laid down a number of sound keels for the use of later adventurers. Putting aside his instructive excursions into the psychology of detection—instructive, because we can trace their influence in so many of Poe's successors down to the present day—putting these aside, and discounting that atmosphere of creepiness which Poe so successfully diffused about nearly all he wrote, we shall probably find that to us, sophisticated and trained on an intensive study of detective fiction, his plots are thin to transparency. But in Poe's day they represented a new technique. As a matter of fact, it is doubtful whether there are more than half a dozen deceptions in the mystery-monger's bag of tricks, and we shall find that Poe has got most of them, at any rate in embryo.

Take, first, the three Dupin stories. In *The Murders in the Rue Morgue,* an old woman and her daughter are found horribly murdered in an (apparently) hermetically sealed room. An innocent person is arrested by the police. Dupin proves that the police have failed to discover one mode of entrance to the room, and deduces from a number of observations that the "murder" was committed by a huge ape. Here is, then a combination of three typical motifs: the wrongly suspected man, to whom all the superficial evidence (motive, access, etc.) points; the hermetically sealed death-chamber (still a favourite central theme); finally, the *solution by the unexpected means.* In addition, we have Dupin drawing deductions, which the police have overlooked, from the evidence of witnesses (superiority in inference), and discovering clues which the police have not thought of looking for owing to obsession by an *idée fixe* (superiority in observation based on

[12] Lord Gorell: *In the Night*

[13] G. D. H. & M. Cole.

[14] Wilkie Collins—who was curiously fascinated by the "strong-minded" woman—made two attempts at the woman detective in *No Name* and *The Law and the Lady*. The spirit of the time was, however, too powerful to allow these attempts to be altogether successful.

inference). In this story also are enunciated for the first time those two great aphorisms of detective science: first, that when you have eliminated all the impossibilities, then, whatever remains, *however improbable,* must be the truth; and, secondly, that the more *outré* a case may appear, the easier it is to solve. Indeed, take it all round, *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* constitutes in itself almost a complete manual of detective theory and practice.

In *The Purloined Letter,* we have one of those stolen documents on whose recovery hangs the peace of mind of a distinguished personage. It is not, indeed, one of the sort whose publication would spread consternation among the Chancelleries of Europe, but it is important enough. The police suspect a certain minister of taking it. They ransack every corner of his house, in vain. Dupin, arguing from his knowledge of the minister's character, decides that subtlety must be met by subtlety. He calls on the minister and discovers the letter, turned inside out and stuck in a letter-rack in full view of the casual observer.

Here we have, besides the reiteration, in inverted form,[15] of aphorism No. 2 (above), the method of *psychological deduction* and the solution by the formula of the *most obvious place.* This trick is the forerunner of the diamond concealed in the tumbler of water, the man murdered in the midst of a battle, Chesterton's *Invisible Man* (the postman, so familiar a figure that his presence goes unnoticed),[16] and a whole line of similar ingenuities.

The third Dupin story, *The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,* has fewer imitators, but is the most interesting of all to the connoisseur. It consists entirely of a series of newspaper cuttings relative to the disappearance and murder of a shopgirl, with Dupin's comments thereon. The story contains no solution of the problem, and, indeed, no formal ending—and that for a very good reason. The disappearance was a genuine one, its actual heroine being one Mary Cecilia Rogers, and the actual place New York. The newspaper cuttings were also, *mutatis mutandis,* genuine. The paper which published Poe's article dared not publish his conclusion. Later on it was claimed that

[15] "The business is very simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear of it because it is so excessively *odd.*"

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair *is* so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said Dupin.

The psychology of the matter is fully discussed in Poe's characteristic manner a few pages further on.

[16] G. K. Chesterton: *The Innocence of Father Brown.*

his argument was, in substance, correct; and though this claim was I believe, challenged later, Poe may, nevertheless, be ranked among the small band of mystery-writers who have put their skill in deduction to the acid test of a problem which they had not in the first place invented.[17]

Of the other Poe stories, one, *Thou Art the Man,* is very slight in theme and unpleasantly flippant in treatment. A man is murdered; a hearty person, named, with guileless cunning, Goodfellow, is very energetic in fixing the crime on a certain person. The narrator of the story makes a repulsive kind of jack-in-the-box out of the victim's corpse, and extorts a confession of guilt from—Goodfellow! Of course. Nevertheless, we have here two more leading motifs that have done overtime since Poe's day: the trail of false clues laid by the real murderer, and the *solution by way of the most unlikely person.*

The fifth story is *The Gold Bug.* In this a man finds a cipher which leads him to the discovery of a hidden treasure. The cipher is of the very simple one-sign-one-letter type, and its solution, of the mark-where-the-shadow-falls-take-three-paces-to-the-east-and-dig variety. In technique this story is the exact opposite of *Marie Rogêt;* the narrator is astonished by the antics of his detective friend, and is kept in entire ignorance of what he is about until *after* the discovery of the treasure; only then is the cipher for the first time either mentioned or explained. Some people think that *The Gold Bug* is Poe's finest mystery-story.

Now, with *The Gold Bug* at the one extreme and *Marie Rogêt* at the other, and the other three stories occupying intermediate places, Poe stands at the parting of the ways for detective fiction. From him go the two great lines of development—the Romantic and the Classic, or, to use terms less abraded by ill-usage, the purely Sensational and the purely Intellectual. In the former, thrill is piled on thrill and mystification on mystification; the reader is led on from bewilderment to bewilderment, till everything is explained in a lump in the last chapter. This school is strong in dramatic incident and atmosphere; its weakness is a tendency to confusion and a dropping of links—its explanations do not always explain; it is never dull, but it is sometimes nonsense. In the other—the purely Intellectual type—the action mostly takes place in the first chapter or so; the detective then follows up quietly from clue to clue till the problem is solved, the reader accompanying the great man in his search and being allowed to try his own teeth on the material provided. The strength of this school is its analytical ingenuity; its weakness is its liability to dullness and

[17] Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's successful efforts on behalf of George Edalji and Oscar Slater deserve special mention.

pomposity, its mouthing over the infinitely little, and its lack of movement and emotion.

Intellectual and Sensational Lines of Development

The purely Sensational thriller is not particularly rare—we may find plenty of examples in the work of William Le Queux, Edgar Wallace, and others. The purely Intellectual is rare indeed; few writers have consistently followed the *Marie Rogêt* formula of simply spreading the *whole* evidence before the reader and leaving him to deduce the detective's conclusion from it if he can.

M. P. Shiel, indeed, did so in his trilogy, *Prince Zaleski,* whose curious and elaborate beauty recaptures in every arabesque sentence the very accent of Edgar Allan Poe. Prince Zaleski, "victim of a too importunate, too unfortunate Love, which the fulgor of the throne itself could not abash," sits apart in his ruined tower in "the semi-darkness of the very faint greenish lustre radiated from an open censer-like *lampas* in the centre of the domed encausted roof," surrounded by Flemish sepulchral brasses, runic tablets, miniature paintings, winged bulls, Tamil scriptures on lacquered leaves of the talipot, mediæval reliquaries richly gemmed, Brahmin gods, and Egyptian mummies, and lulled by "the low, liquid tinkling of an invisible musical-box." Like Sherlock Holmes, he indulges in a drug—"the narcotic *cannabis sativa:* the base of the *bhang* of the Mohammedans." A friend brings to him the detective problems of the outside world, which he proceeds to solve from the data given and (except in the final story) without stirring from his couch. He adorns his solutions with philosophical discourses on the social progress of mankind, all delivered with the same melancholy grace and remote intellectual disdain. The reasoning is subtle and lucid, but the crimes themselves are fantastic and incredible—a fault which these tales have in common with those of G. K. Chesterton.

Another writer who uses the *Marie Rogêt* formula is Baroness Orczy. Her *Old Man in the Corner* series is constructed precisely on those lines, and I have seen a French edition in which, when the expository part of the story is done, the reader is exhorted to: "Pause a moment and see if you can arrive at the explanation yourself, before you read the Old Man's solution." This pure puzzle is a formula which obviously has its limitations. Nearest to this among later writers comes Freeman Wills Crofts, whose painstaking sleuths always "play fair" and display their clues to the reader as soon as they have picked them up. The intellectually minded reader can hardly demand more than this. The aim of the writer of this

type of detective-story is to make the reader say at the end, neither: "Oh well, I knew it must be that all along," nor yet: 'Dash it all! I couldn't be expected to guess that"; but: "Oh, of course! What a fool I was not to see it! Right under my nose all the time!" Precious tribute! How often striven for! How rarely earned!

On the whole, however, the tendency is for the modern educated public to demand fair play from the writer, and for the Sensational and Intellectual branches of the story to move further apart.

Before going further with this important question, we must look back once more to the middle of the last century, and see what development took place to bridge the gap between Dupin and Sherlock Holmes.

Poe, like a restless child, played with his new toy for a little while, and then, for some reason, wearied of it. He turned his attention to other things, and his formula lay neglected for close on forty years. Meanwhile a somewhat different type of detective-story was developing independently in Europe. In 1848 the elder Dumas, always ready to try his hand at any novel and ingenious thing, suddenly inserted into the romantic body of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne* a passage of pure scientific deduction. This passage is quite unlike anything else in the Musketeer cycle, and looks like the direct outcome of Dumas' keen interest in actual crime.[18]

But there is another literary influence which, though the fact is not generally recognised, must have been powerfully exerted at this date upon writers of mystery fiction. Between 1820 and 1850 the novels of Fenimore Cooper began to enjoy their huge popularity, and were not only widely read in America and England, but translated into most European languages. In *The Pathfinder, The Deerslayer, The Last of the Mohicans,* and the rest of the series, Cooper revealed to the delighted youth of two hemispheres the Red Indian's patient skill in tracking his quarry by footprints, in interrogating a broken twig, a mossy trunk, a fallen leaf. The imagination of childhood was fired; every boy wanted to be an Uncas or a Chingachgook. Novelists, not content with following and imitating Cooper on his own ground, discovered a better way, by transferring the romance of the woodland tracker to the surroundings of their native country. In the 'sixties the generation who had read Fenimore Cooper in boyhood turned, as novelists and readers, to tracing the spoor of the criminal upon their own native heath. The enthusiasm for Cooper combined magnificently with that absorbing interest in crime and detection which better methods of communication and an improved police system had made possible. While, in France, Gaboriau

[18] He published a great collection of famous crimes.

and Fortuné du Boisgobey concentrated upon the police nove pure and simple, English writers, still permeated by the terro and mystery of the romantic movement, and influenced by th "Newgate novel" of Bulwer and Ainsworth, perfected a mor varied and imaginative genre, in which the ingenuity of th detective problem allied itself with the sombre terrors of th weird and supernatural.

The Pre-Doyle Period

Of the host of writers who attempted this form of fictio in the 'sixties and 'seventies, three may be picked out fo special mention.

That voluminous writer, Mrs. Henry Wood, represents o the whole, the melodramatic and adventurous development o the crime-story as distinct from the detective problem proper Through *East Lynne*, crude and sentimental as it is, she exer cised an enormous influence on the rank and file of sensationa novelists, and at her best, she is a most admirable spinner o plots. Whether her problem concerns a missing will, a vanishe heir, a murder, or a family curse, the story spins along withou flagging, and, though she is a little too fond of calling i Providence to cut the knot of intrigue with the sword of coin cidence, the mystery is fully and properly unravelled, in workmanlike manner and without any loose ends. She make frequent use of supernatural thrills. Sometimes these are ex plained away: a "murdered" person is seen haunting th local churchyard, and turns out never to have been killed a all. Sometimes the supernatural remains supernatural, as, fo instance, the coffin-shaped appearance in *The Shadow o Ashlydyat*. Her morality is perhaps a little oppressive, but sh is by no means without humour, and at times can produce shrewd piece of characterisation.

Melodramatic, but a writer of real literary attainment, an gifted with a sombre power which has seldom been equalle in painting the ghastly and the macabre, is Sheridan Le Fanu Like Poe, he has the gift of investing the most mechanica of plots with an atmosphere of almost unbearable horro Take, for example, that scene in *Wylder's Hand* where th aged Uncle Lorne appears—phantom or madman? we ar not certain which—to confront the villainous Lake in th tapestried room.

> "'Mark Wylder is in evil plight,' said he.
>
> "'Is he?' said Lake with a sly scoff, though he seemed to me a good deal scared. 'We hear no complaints, how-

ever, and fancy he must be tolerably comfortable notwithstanding.'

" 'You know where he is,' said Uncle Lorne.

" 'Aye, in Italy; everyone knows that,' answered Lake.

" 'In Italy,' said the old man reflectively, as if trying to gather up his ideas, 'Italy. . . . He has had a great tour to make. It is nearly accomplished now; when it is done, he will be like me, *humano major*. He has seen the places which you are yet to see.'

" 'Nothing I should like better; particularly Italy,' said Lake.

" 'Yes,' said Uncle Lorne, lifting up slowly a different finger at each name in his catalogue. 'First, Lucus Mortis; then Terra Tenebrosa; next, Tartarus; after that Terra Oblivionis; then Herebus; then Barathrum; then Gehenna, and then Stagnum Ignis.'

" 'Of course,' acquiesced Lake, with an ugly sneer. . . .

" 'Don't be frightened—but he's alive; I think they'll make him mad. It is a frightful plight. Two angels buried him alive in Vallombrosa by night; I saw it, standing among the lotus and hemlocks. A negro came to me, a black clergyman with white eyes, and remained beside me; and the angels imprisoned Mark; they put him on duty forty days and forty nights, with his ear to the river listening for voices; and when it was over we blessed them; and the clergyman walked with me a long while, to-and-fro, to-and-fro upon the earth, telling me the wonders of the abyss.'

" 'And is it from the abyss, sir, he writes his letters?' enquired the Town Clerk, with a wink at Lake.

" 'Yes, yes, very diligent; it behoves him; and his hair is always standing straight on his head for fear. But he'll be sent up again, at last, a thousand, a hundred, ten and one, black marble steps, and then it will be the other one's turn. So it was prophesied by the black magician.' "

This chapter leads immediately to those in which Larkin, the crooked attorney, discovers, by means of a little sound detective work of a purely practical sort, that Mark Wylder's letters have indeed been written "from the abyss." Mark Wylder has, in fact, been murdered, and the letters are forgeries sent abroad to be despatched by Lake's confederate from various towns in Italy. From this point we gradually learn to expect the ghastly moment when he is "sent up again at last" from the grave, in the Blackberry Dell at Gylingden.

"In the meantime the dogs continued their unaccountable yelling close by.

"'What the devil's that?' said Wealden.
"Something like a stunted, blackened branch was sticking out of the peat, ending in a set of short, thickish twigs. This is what it seemed. The dogs were barking at it. It was, really, a human hand and arm. . . ."

In this book the detection is done by private persons, an the local police are only brought in at the end to secure th criminal. This is also the case in that extremely interestin book *Checkmate* (1870), in which the plot actually turns upo the complete alteration of the criminal's appearance by miracle of plastic surgery. It seems amazing that more use wa not made of this device in post-war days, when the reconstru tion of faces had become comparatively common and, wit the perfecting of aseptic surgery, infinitely easier than in L Fanu's day. I can only call to mind two recent examples o this kind: one, Mr. Hopkins Moorhouse's *Gauntlet of Alcest* the other, a short story called *The Losing of Jasper Virel,* b Beckles Willson.[19] In both stories the alterations include th tattooing of the criminal's eyes from blue to brown.

For sheer grimness and power, there is little in the literatu of horror to compare with the trepanning scene in Le Fanu *The House by the Churchyard.* Nobody who has ever read could possibly forget that sick chamber, with the stricken ma sunk in his deathly stupor; the terrified wife; the local docto kindly and absurd—and then the pealing of the bell, and th entry of the brilliant, brutal Dillon "in dingy splendours an a great draggled wig, with a gold-headed cane in his bon hand . . . diffusing a reek of whisky-punch, and with a case o instruments under his arm," to perform the operation. Th whole scene is magnificently written, with the surgeon's mu tered technicalities heard through the door, the footsteps– then the silence while the trepanning is proceeding, and th wounded Sturk's voice, which no one ever thought to hea again, raised as if from the grave to denounce his murderer That chapter in itself would entitle Le Fanu to be called master of mystery and horror.

Most important of all during this period we have Wilki Collins. An extremely uneven writer, Collins is less apprec ated to-day than his merits and influence deserve.[20] He wi not bear comparison with Le Fanu in his treatment of th weird, though he was earnestly ambitious to succeed in thi line. His style was too dry and inelastic, his mind to legal. Consider the famous dream in *Armadale,* divided int seventeen separate sections, each elaborately and successivel

[19] *Strand Magazine,* July 1909.
[20] In the British Museum catalogue only two critical studies of th celebrated English mystery-monger are listed: one is by an America the other by a German.

fulfilled in laborious detail! In the curious semi-supernatural rhythm of *The Woman in White* he came nearer to genuine achievement, but, on the whole, his eerieness is wire-drawn and unconvincing. But he greatly excels Le Fanu in humour, and in the cunning of his rogues,[21] in character-drawing, and especially in the architecture of his plots. Taking everything into consideration, *The Moonstone* is probably the very finest detective story ever written. By comparison with its wide scope, its dovetailed completeness and the marvellous variety and soundness of its characterisation, modern mystery fiction looks thin and mechanical. Nothing human is perfect, but *The Moonstone* comes about as near perfection as anything of its kind can be.

In *The Moonstone* Collins used the convention of telling the story in a series of narratives from the pens of the various actors concerned. Modern realism—often too closely wedded to externals—is prejudiced against this device. It is true that, for example, Betteredge's narrative is not at all the kind of thing that a butler would be likely to write; nevertheless, it has an ideal truth—it is the kind of thing that Betteredge might think and feel, even if he could not write it. And, granted this convention of the various narratives, how admirably the characters are drawn! The pathetic figure of Rosanna Spearman, with her deformity and her warped devotion, is beautifully handled, with a freedom from sentimentality which is very remarkable. In Rachel Verinder, Collins has achieved one of the novelist's hardest tasks; he has depicted a girl who is virtuous, a gentlewoman, and really interesting, and that without the slightest exaggeration or deviation from naturalness and probability. From his preface to the book it is clear that he took especial pains with this character, and his success was so great as almost to defeat itself. Rachel is so little spectacular that we fail to realise what a singularly fine and truthful piece of work she is.

The detective part of the story is well worth attention. The figure of Sergeant Cuff is drawn with a restraint and sobriety which makes him seem a little colourless beside Holmes and Thorndyke and Carrados, but he is a very living figure. One can believe that he made a success of his rose-growing when he retired; he genuinely loved roses, whereas one can never feel that the great Sherlock possessed quite the right feeling for his bees. Being an official detective Sergeant Cuff is bound

[21] Collins made peculiarly his own the art of plot and counter-plot. Thus we have the magnificent duels of Marion Halcombe and Count Fosco in *The Woman in White;* Captain Wragge and Mrs. Lecount in *No Name;* the Pedgifts and Miss Gwilt in *Armadale.* Move answers to move as though on a chessboard (but very much more briskly), until the villain is manoeuvred into the corner where a cunningly contrived legal checkmate has been quietly awaiting him from the beginning of the game.

by the etiquette of his calling. He is never really given a free hand with Rachel, and the conclusion he comes to is a wrong one. But he puts in a good piece of detective work in the matter of Rosanna and the stained nightgown; and the scene in which his shrewdness and knowledge of human nature are contrasted with the blundering stupidity of Superintendent Seagrave read like an essay in the manner of Poe.

It is, of course, a fact that the Dupin stories had been published fifteen years or so when *The Moonstone* appeared. But there is no need to seek in them for the original of Sergeant Cuff. He had his prototype in real life, and the whole night-gown incident was modelled, with some modifications, upon a famous case of the early 'sixties—the murder of little William Kent by his sixteen-year-old sister, Constance. Those who are interested in origins will find an excellent account of the "Road murder," as it is called, in Miss Tennyson Jesse's *Murder and its Motives*, or in Atkey's *Famous Trials of the Nineteenth Century*, and may compare the methods of Sergeant Cuff with those of the real Detective Whicher.

Wilkie Collins himself claimed that nearly all his plots were founded on fact; indeed, this was his invariable answer when the charge of improbability was preferred against him.

> " 'I wish,' he cries angrily to a friend, 'before people make such assertions, they would think what they are writing or talking about. I know of very few instances in which fiction exceeds the probability of reality. I'll tell you where I got many of my plots from. I was in Paris, wandering about the streets with Charles Dickens, amusing ourselves by looking into the shops. We came to an old book stall—half-shop and half-store—and I found some dilapidated volumes and records of French crime—a sort of French Newgate Calendar. I said to Dickens "Here is a prize!" So it turned out to be. In them I found some of my best plots.' "[22]

Not that Collins was altogether disingenuous in his claim never to have o'erstepped the modesty of nature. While each one of his astonishing contrivances and coincidences might, taken separately, find its parallel in real life, it remains true that in cramming a whole series of such improbabilities into the course of a single story he does frequently end by staggering all belief. But even so, he was a master craftsman, whom many modern mystery-mongers might imitate to their profit. He never wastes an incident; he never leaves a loose end; no incident, however trivial on the one hand or sensa-

[22] Wybert Reeve: "Recollections of Wilkie Collins," *Chambers' Journal*, Vol. IX., p. 458.

onal on the other, is ever introduced for the mere sake of musement or sensation. Take, for example, the great "sen- tion-scene" in *No Name*, where for half an hour Magdalen ts, with the bottle of laudanum in her hand, counting the ssing ships. "If, in that time, an even number passed her— ie sign given should be a sign to live. If the uneven number revailed, the end should be—death." Here, you would say, pure sensationalism; it is a situation invented deliberately wring tears and anguish from the heart of the reader. But ou would be wrong. That bottle of laudanum is brought in ecause it will be wanted again, later on. In the next section f the story it is found in Magdalen's dressing-case, and this iscovery, by leading her husband to suppose that she means o murder him, finally induces him to cut her out of his will, nd so becomes one of the most important factors in the plot.

In *The Moonstone*, which of all his books comes nearest o being a detective story in the modern sense, Collins uses with great effect the formula of the most unlikely person[23] nd the unexpected means in conjunction. Opium is the means n this case—a drug with whose effects we are tolerably fa- niliar to-day, but which in Collins' time was still something f an unknown quantity, de Quincey notwithstanding. In the pium of *The Moonstone* and the plastic surgery of *Check- mate* we have the distinguished forebears of a long succession f medical and scientific mysteries which stretches down to the present day.

During the 'seventies and early 'eighties the long novel of marvel and mystery held the field, slowly unrolling its labyrinthine complexity through its three ample volumes crammed with incident and leisurely drawn characters.[24]

Sherlock Holmes and His Influence

In 1887 *A Study in Scarlet* was flung like a bombshell into the field of detective fiction, to be followed within a few short

[23] Franklin Blake—the actual, though unconscious thief. By an ingenious turn, this discovery does not end the story. The diamond is still missing, and a further chase leads to the really guilty party (Godfrey Ablewhite). The character of this gentleman is enough to betray his villainy to the modern reader, though it may have seemed less repulsive to the readers in the 'sixties. His motive, however, is made less obvious, although it is quite honourably and fairly hinted at for the observant reader to guess.

[24] We must not leave this period without mentioning the stories of Anna Katherine Green, of which the long series begins with *The Leavenworth Case* in 1883, and extends almost to the present day. They are genuine detective-stories, often of considerable ingenuity, but marred by an uncritical sentimentality of style and treatment which makes them difficult reading for the modern student. They are, however, important by their volume and by their influence on other American writers.

and brilliant years by the marvellous series of Sherlock Holmes short stories. The effect was electric. Conan Doyle took up the Poe formula and galvanised it into life and popularity. He cut out the elaborate psychological introductions, or restated them in crisp dialogue. He brought into prominence what Poe had only lightly touched upon—the deduction of staggering conclusions from trifling indications in the Dumas-Cooper-Gaboriau manner. He was sparkling, surprising, and short. It was the triumph of the epigram.

A comparison of the Sherlock Holmes tales with the Dupin tales shows clearly how much Doyle owed to Poe, and, at the same time, how greatly he modified Poe's style and formula. Read, for instance, the opening pages of *The Murders in the Rue Morgue,* which introduce Dupin, and compare them with the first chapter of *A Study in Scarlet.* Or merely set side by side the two passages which follow and contrast the relations between Dupin and his chronicler on the one hand, and between Holmes and Watson on the other:

"I was astonished, too, at the vast extent of his reading; and, above all, I felt my soul enkindled within me by the wild fervour, and the vivid freshness of his imagination. Seeking in Paris the objects I then sought, I felt that the society of such a man would be to me a treasure beyond price; and this feeling I frankly confided to him. It was at length arranged that we should live together . . . and as my worldly circumstances were somewhat less embarrassed than his own, I was permitted to be at the expense of renting, and furnishing in a style which suited the rather fantastic gloom of our common temper, a time-eaten and grotesque mansion . . . in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg Saint Germain . . . It was a freak of fancy in my friend (for what else shall I call it?) to be enamoured of the Night for her own sake; and into this *bizarrerie,* as into all his others, I quietly fell, giving myself up to his wild whims with a perfect abandon.[25]

"An anomaly which often struck me in the character of my friend Sherlock Holmes was that, though in his methods of thought he was the neatest and most methodical of mankind, and although also he affected a certain quiet primness of dress, he was none the less in his personal habits one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction. Not that I am in the least conventional in that respect myself. The rough-and-tumble work in Afghanistan, coming on the top of a

[25] *The Murders in the Rue Morgue.*

natural Bohemianism of disposition, has made me rather more lax than befits a medical man. But with me there is a limit, and when I find a man who keeps his cigars in the coal-scuttle, his tobacco in the toe-end of a Persian slipper, and his unanswered correspondence transfixed by a jackknife into the very centre of his wooden mantelpiece, then I begin to give myself virtuous airs. I have always held, too, that pistol-practice should distinctly be an open-air pastime; and when Holmes in one of his queer humours would sit in an arm-chair, with his hair-trigger and a hundred Boxer cartridges, and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V.R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it."[26]

See how the sturdy independence of Watson adds salt and savour to the eccentricities of Holmes, and how flavourless beside it is the hero-worshipping self-abnegation of Dupin's friend. See, too, how the concrete details of daily life in Baker Street lift the story out of the fantastic and give it a solid reality. The Baker Street ménage has just that touch of humorous commonplace which appeals to British readers.

Another pair of parallel passages will be found in *The Purloined Letter* and *The Naval Treaty*. They show the two detectives in dramatic mood, surprising their friends by their solution of the mystery. In *The Adventure of the Priory School,* also, a similar situation occurs, though Holmes is here shown in a grimmer vein, rebuking wickedness in high places.

Compare, also, the conversational styles of Holmes and Dupin, and the reasons for Holmes's popularity become clearer than ever. Holmes has enriched English literature with more than one memorable aphorism and turn of speech.

" 'You know my methods, Watson.'

" 'A long shot, Watson—a very long shot.'

" '—a little monograph on the hundred-and-fourteen varieties of tobacco-ash.'

" 'These are deep waters, Watson.'

" 'Excellent!' cried Mr. Acton.—'But very superficial,' said Holmes.

" 'Excellent!' I cried.—'Elementary,' said he.

" 'It is of the highest importance in the art of detection to be able to recognise out of a number of facts which are incidental and which vital.'

" 'You mentioned your name as if I should recognize it, but beyond the obvious facts that you are a bachelor,

[26] *The Musgrave Ritual.*

a solicitor, a Freemason and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you.'

" 'Every problem becomes very childish when once it is explained to you.' "

Nor must we forget that delightful form of riposto which Father Ronald Knox has wittily christened the "Sherlockismus":

" 'I would call your attention to the curious incident of the dog in the night-time.'

" 'The dog did nothing in the night-time.'

" 'That was the curious incident.' "

So, with Sherlock Holmes, the ball—the original nucleus deposited by Edgar Allan Poe nearly forty years earlier—was at last set rolling. As it went, it swelled into a vast mass—it set off others—it became a spate—a torrent—an avalanche of mystery fiction. It is impossible to keep track of all the detective-stories produced to-day. Book upon book, magazine upon magazine pour out from the Press, crammed with murders, thefts, arsons, frauds, conspiracies, problems, puzzles, mysteries, thrills, maniacs, crooks, poisoners, forgers, garrotters, police, spies, secret-service men, detectives, until it seems that half the world must be engaged in setting riddles for the other half to solve.

The Scientific Detective

The boom began in the 'nineties, when the detective short story, till then rather neglected, strode suddenly to the front and made the pace rapidly under the ægis of Sherlock Holmes. Of particular interest is the long series which appeared under various titles from the pens of L. T. Meade and her collaborators. These struck out a line—not new, indeed, for, as we have seen, it is as old as Collins and Le Fanu, but important because it was paving the way for great developments in a scientific age—the medical mystery story. Mrs. Meade opened up this fruitful vein with *Stories from the Diary of a Doctor* in 1893,[27] and pursued it in various magazines almost without a break to *The Sorceress of the Strand*[28] in 1902. These tales range from mere records of queer cases to genuine detective-stories in which the solution has a scientific or medical foundation. During this long collaboration, the authors

[27] In collaboration with "Clifford Halifax."

[28] In collaboration with Robert Eustace. In these stories the scientific basis was provided by Robert Eustace, and the actual writing done, for the most part, by L. T. Meade.

deal with such subjects as hypnotism, catalepsy (so-called—then a favourite disease among fiction-writers), somnambulism, lunacy, murder by the use of X-rays and hydrocyanic acid gas, and a variety of other medical and scientific discoveries and inventions.

More definitely in the Holmes tradition is the sound and excellent work of Arthur Morrison in the "Martin Hewitt" books. Various authors such as John Oxenham and Manville Fenn also tried their hands at the detective-story, before turning to specialise in other work. We get also many lively tales of adventure and roguery, with a strong thread of detective interest, as, for example, the "African Millionaire" series by Grant Allen.

Now in the great roar and rush of enthusiasm which greeted Sherlock Holmes, the detective-story became swept away on a single current of development. We observed, in discussing the Poe tales, that there were three types of story—the Intellectual (*Marie Rogêt*), the Sensational (*The Gold Bug*), and the Mixed (*Murders in the Rue Morgue*). "Sherlock Holmes" tales, as a rule, are of the mixed type. Holmes—I regret to say it—does not always play fair with the reader. He "picks up," or "pounces upon," a "minute object," and draws a brilliant deduction from it, but the reader, however brilliant, cannot himself anticipate that deduction because he is not told what the "small object" is. It is Watson's fault, of course—Holmes, indeed, remonstrated with him on at least one occasion about his unscientific methods of narration.

An outstanding master of this "surprise" method is Melville Davisson Post. His tales are so admirably written, and his ideas so ingenious, that we fail at first reading to realise how strictly sensational they are in their method. Take, for instance, *An Act of God* from *Uncle Abner* (1911). In this tale, Uncle Abner uses the phonetic mis-spelling in a letter supposed to be written by a deaf mute to prove that the letter was not, in fact, written by him. If the text of the letter were placed before the reader, and he were given a chance to make his deduction for himself, the tale would be a true detective-story of the Intellectual type; but the writer keeps this clue to himself, and springs the detective's conclusions upon us like a bolt from the blue.

The Modern "Fair-play" Method

For many years, the newness of the genre and the immense prestige of Holmes blinded readers' eyes to these feats of legerdemain. Gradually, however, as the bedazzlement wore off, the public became more and more exacting. The uncritical

are still catered for by the "thriller," in which nothing is explained, but connoisseurs have come, more and more, to call for a story which puts them on an equal footing with the detective himself, as regards all clues and discoveries.

Seeing that the demand for equal opportunities is coupled to-day with an insistence on strict technical accuracy in the smallest details of the story, it is obvious that the job of writing detective-stories is by no means growing easier. The reader must be given every clue—but he must not be told, surely, all the detective's deductions, lest he should see the solution too far ahead. Worse still, supposing, even without the detective's help, he interprets all the clues accurately on his own account, what becomes of the surprise? How can we at the same time show the reader everything and yet legitimately obfuscate him as to its meaning?

Various devices are used to get over the difficulty. Frequently the detective, while apparently displaying his clues openly, will keep up his sleeve some bit of special knowledge which the reader does not possess. Thus, Thorndyke can cheerfully show you all his finds. You will be none the wiser, unless you happen to have an intimate acquaintance with the fauna of local ponds; the effect of belladonna on rabbits; the physical and chemical properties of blood; optics; tropical diseases; metallurgy; hieroglyphics, and a few other trifles. Another method of misleading is to tell the reader what the detective has observed and deduced—but to make the observations and deductions turn out to be incorrect, thus leading up to a carefully manufactured surprise-packet in the last chapter.[29]

Some writers still cling to the Watson formula. The story is told through the mouth, or at least through the eyes, of a Watson.[30] Others, like A. A. Milne in his *Red House Mystery*, adopt a mixed method. Mr. Milne begins by telling his tale from the position of a detached spectator; later on, we find that he has shifted round, and is telling it through the personality of Bill Beverley (a simple-minded but not unintelligent Watson); at another moment we find ourselves actually

[29] E. C. Bentley: *Trent's Last Case;* Lord Gorell: *In the Night;* George Pleydell: *The Ware Case;* etc.

[30] An exceptional handling of the Watson theme is found in Agatha Christie's *Murder of Roger Ackroyd*, which is a *tour de force*. Some critics, as, for instance, Mr. W. H. Wright in his introduction to *The Great Detective Stories* (Scribners, 1927), consider the solution illegitimate. I fancy, however, that this opinion merely represents a natural resentment at having been ingeniously bamboozled. All the necessary data are given. The reader ought to be able to guess the criminal, if he is sharp enough, and nobody can ask for more than this. It is, after all, the reader's job to keep his wits about him, and, like the perfect detective, to suspect *everybody*.

looking out through the eyes of Anthony Gillingham, the detective himself.

Importance of the Viewpoint

The skill of a modern detective novelist is largely shown by the play he makes with these various viewpoints.[31] Let us see how it is done in an acknowledged masterpiece of the genre. We will examine for the purpose a page of Mr. E. C. Bentley's *Trent's Last Case*. Viewpoint No. 1 is what we may call the Watson viewpoint; the detective's external actions only are seen by the reader. Viewpoint No. 2 is the middle viewpoint; we see what the detective sees, but are not told what he observes. Viewpoint No. 3 is that of close intimacy with the detective; we see all he sees, and are at once told his conclusions.

We begin from Viewpoint No. 2.

> "Two bedroom doors faced him on the other side of the passage. He opened that which was immediately opposite, and entered a bedroom by no means austerely tidy. Some sticks and fishing-rods stood confusedly in one corner, a pile of books in another. The housemaid's hand had failed to give a look of order to the jumble of heterogeneous objects left on the dressing-table and on the mantel-shelf—pipes, penknives, pencils, keys, golf-balls, old letters, photographs, small boxes, tins, and bottles. Two fine etchings and some water-colour sketches hung on the walls; leaning against the end of the wardrobe, unhung, were a few framed engravings."

First Shift: Viewpoint No. 1.

> "A row of shoes and boots was ranged beneath the window. Trent crossed the room and studied them intently; then he measured some of them with his tape, whistling very softly. This done, he sat on the side of the bed, and his eyes roamed gloomily about the room."

Here we observe Trent walking, studying, measuring, whistling, looking gloomy; but we do not know what was peculiar about the boots, nor what the measurements were. From our knowledge of Trent's character we may suppose that his conclusions are unfavourable to the amiable suspect, Marlowe, but we are not ourselves allowed to handle the material evidence.

[31] For a most fascinating and illuminating discussion of this question of viewpoint in fiction, see Mr. Percy Lubbock: *The Craft of Fiction.*

Second Shift: Back to Viewpoint No. 2.

"The photographs on the mantel-shelf attracted him presently. He rose and examined one representing Marlowe and Manderson on horseback. Two others were views of famous peaks in the Alps. There was a faded print of three youths—one of them unmistakably his acquaintance of the haggard blue eyes [i.e. Marlowe]—clothed in tatterdemalion soldier's gear of the sixteenth century. Another was a portrait of a majestic old lady, slightly resembling Marlowe. Trent, mechanically taking a cigarette from an open box on the mantel-shelf, lit it and stared at the photographs."

Here, as at the opening of the paragraph, we are promoted to a more privileged position. We see all the evidence, and have an equal opportunity with Trent of singling out the significant detail—the fancy-costume portrait—and deducting from it that Marlowe was an active member of the O.U.D.S., and, by inference, capable of acting a part at a pinch.

Third Shift: Viewpoint No. 3.

"Next he turned his attention to a flat leathern case that lay by the cigarette-box. It opened easily. A small and light revolver, of beautiful workmanship, was disclosed, with a score or so of loose cartridges. On the stock were engraved the initials 'J.M.' . . .

"With the pistol in its case between them, Trent and the Inspector looked into each other's eyes for some moments. Trent was the first to speak. 'This mystery is all wrong,' he observed. 'It is insanity. The symptoms of mania are very marked. Let us see how we stand.' "

Throughout the rest of this scene we are taken into Trent's confidence. The revolver is described, we learn what Trent thinks about it from his own lips.

Thus, in a single page, the viewpoint is completely shifted three times, but so delicately that, unless we are looking for it, we do not notice the change.

In a later chapter, we get the final shift to a fourth viewpoint—that of complete mental identification with the detective:

"Mrs. Manderson had talked herself into a more emotional mood than she had yet shown to Trent. Her words flowed freely, and her voice had begun to ring and give play to a natural expressiveness that must hitherto have been dulled, he thought, by the shock and self-restraint of the past few days."

Here the words "had yet shown to Trent" clinch the identification of viewpoint. Throughout the book, we always, in fact, see Mrs. Manderson through Trent's emotions, and the whole second half of the story, when Trent has abandoned his own enquiries and is receiving the true explanation from Marlowe and Cupples, is told from Viewpoint No. 4.

The modern evolution in the direction of "fair play"[32] is to a great extent a revolution. It is a recoil from the Holmes influence and a turning back to *The Moonstone* and its contemporaries. There is no mystification about *The Moonstone*—no mystification of the reader, that is. With such scrupulous care has Collins laid the clues that the "ideal reasoner" might guess the entire outline of the story at the end of the first ten chapters of Betteredge's first narrative.[33]

Artistic Status of the Detective-Story

As the detective ceases to be impenetrable and infallible and becomes a man touched with the feeling of our infirmities, so the rigid technique of the art necessarily expands a little. In its severest form, the mystery-story is a pure analytical exercise, and, as such, may be a highly finished work of art, within its highly artificial limits. There is one respect, at least, in which the detective-story has an advantage over every other kind of novel. It possesses an Aristotelian perfection of beginning, middle, and end. A definite and single problem is set, worked out, and solved; its conclusion

[32] It is needless to add that the detectives must be given fair play, too. Once they are embarked upon an investigation, no episode must ever be described which does not come within their cognisance. It is artistically shocking that the reader should be taken into the author's confidence behind the investigator's back. Thus, the reader's interest in *The Deductions of Colonel Gore* (Lynn Brock) is sensibly diminished by the fact of his knowing (as Gore does not) that it was Cecil Arndale who witnessed the scene between Mrs. Melhuish and Barrington near the beginning of the book. Those tales in which the action is frequently punctuated by eavesdropping of this kind on the reader's part belong to the merely Sensational class of detective-story, and rapidly decline into melodrama.

[33] Poe performed a similar feat in the case of *Barnaby Rudge,* of which he correctly prognosticated the whole development after reading the first serial part. Unhappily, he was not alive to perform the same office for *Edwin Drood!* Dickens came more and more to hanker after plot and mystery. His early efforts in this style are crude, and the mystery as a rule pretty transparent. In *Edwin Drood* he hoped that the "story would turn upon an interest suspended until the end," and the hope was only too thoroughly fulfilled. Undoubtedly his close friendship with Collins helped to influence him in the direction of mystery fiction; in the previous year (1867) he had pronounced *The Moonstone:* "Much better than anything he [Collins] has done."

is not arbitrarily conditioned by marriage or death.[84] It has the rounded (thought limited) perfection of a triolet. The farther it escapes from pure analysis, the more difficulty it has in achieving artistic unity.

It does not, and by hypothesis never can, attain the loftiest level of literary achievement. Though it deals with the most desperate effects of rage, jealousy, and revenge, it rarely touches the heights and depths of human passion. It presents us only with the *fait accompli*, and looks upon death and mutilation with a dispassionate eye. It does not show us the inner workings of the murderer's mind—it must not; for the identity of the murderer is hidden until the end of the book. The victim is shown rather as a subject for the dissecting-table than as a husband and father. A too violent emotion flung into the glittering mechanism of the detective-story jars the movement by disturbing its delicate balance. The most successful writers are those who contrive to keep the story running from beginning to end upon the same emotional level, and it is better to err in the direction of too little feeling than too much. Here, the writer whose detective is a member of the official force has an advantage: from him a detached attitude is correct; he can suitably retain the impersonal attitude of the surgeon. The sprightly amateur must not be sprightly all the time, lest at some point we should be reminded that this is, after all, a question of somebody's being foully murdered, and that flippancy is indecent. To make the transition from the detached to the human point of view is one of the writer's hardest tasks. It is especially hard when the murderer has been made human and sympathetic. A real person has then to be brought to the gallows, and this must not be done too lightheartedly. Mr. G. K. Chesterton deals with this problem by merely refusing to face it. His Father Brown (who looks at sin and crime from the religious point of view) retires from the problem before the arrest is reached. He is satisfied with a confession. The sordid details take place "off." Other authors permit sympathetic villains to commit suicide. Thus, Mr. Milne's Gillingham, whose attitude starts by being flippant and ends by being rather sentimental, warns Cayley of his approaching arrest, and Cayley shoots himself, leaving a written confession. Monsters of villainy can, of course, be brought to a bad end without compunction; but modern taste rejects monsters, therefore the modern detective-story is compelled to achieve a higher level of writing, and a more competent delineation of character. As the villain is allowed more good streaks in his composition, so the detective

[84] This should appeal to Mr. E. M. Forster, who is troubled by the irrational structure of the novel from this point of view. Unhappily, he has openly avowed himself "too priggish" to enjoy detective-stories. This is bad luck, indeed.

must achieve a tenderer human feeling beneath his frivolity or machine-like efficiency.

Love Interest

One fettering convention, from which detective fiction is only very slowly freeing itself, is that of the "love interest." Publishers and editors still labour under the delusion that all stories must have a nice young man and woman who have to be united in the last chapter. As a result, some of the finest detective-stories are marred by a conventional love-story, irrelevant to the action and perfunctorily worked in. The most harmless form of this disease is that taken, for example, in the works of Mr. Austin Freeman. His secondary characters fall in love with distressing regularity, and perform a number of conventional antics suitable to persons in their condition, but they do not interfere with the course of the story. You can skip the love-passages if you like, and nothing is lost. Far more blameworthy are the heroes who insist on fooling about after young women when they ought to be putting their minds on the job of detection. Just at the critical moment when the trap is set to catch the villain, the sleuth learns that his best girl has been spirited away. Heedlessly he drops everything, and rushes off to Chinatown or to the lonely house on the marshes or wherever it is, without even leaving a note to say where he is going. Here he is promptly sandbagged or entrapped or otherwise made a fool of, and the whole story is impeded and its logical development ruined.

The instances in which the love-story is an integral part of the plot are extremely rare. One very beautiful example occurs in *The Moonstone*. Here the entire plot hangs on the love of two women for Franklin Blake. Both Rachel Verinder and Rosanna Spearman know that he took the diamond, and the whole mystery arises from their efforts to shield him. Their conduct is, in both cases, completely natural and right, and the characters are so finely conceived as to be entirely convincing. E. C. Bentley, in *Trent's Last Case*, has dealt finely with the still harder problem of the detective in love. Trent's love for Mrs. Manderson is a legitimate part of the plot; while it does not prevent him from drawing the proper conclusion from the evidence before him, it does prevent him from acting upon his conclusions, and so prepares the way for the real explanation. Incidentally, the love-story is handled artistically and with persuasive emotion.

In *The House of the Arrow* and, still more strikingly, in *No Other Tiger*, A. E. W. Mason has written stories of strong detective interest which at the same time have the convincing

psychological structure of the novel of character. The characters are presented as a novelist presents them—romantically it is true, but without that stark insistence on classifying and explaining which turns the persons of the ordinary detective story into a collection of museum exhibits.

Apart from such unusual instances as these, the less love in a detective story, the better. "*L'amour au théâtre,*" says Racine, "*ne peut pas être en seconde place,*" and this holds good of detective fiction. A casual and perfunctory love-story is worse than no love-story at all, and, since the mystery must by hypothesis, take the first place, the love is better left out.

Lynn Brock's *The Deductions of Colonel Gore* affords a curious illustration of this truth. Gore sets out, animated by an unselfish devotion to a woman, to recover some compromising letters for her, and, in so doing, becomes involved in unravelling an intricate murder plot. As the story goes on the references to the beloved woman become chillier and more perfunctory; not only does the author seem to have lost interest, but so does Colonel Gore. At length the author notices this, and explains it in a paragraph:

> "There were moments when Gore accused himself—or, rather, felt that he ought to accuse himself—of an undue coldbloodedness in these speculations of his. The business was a horrible business. One ought to have been decently shocked by it. One ought to have been horrified by the thought that three old friends were involved in such a business.
>
> "But the truth was—and his apologies to himself for that truth became feebler and feebler—that the thing had now so caught hold of him that he had come to regard the actors in it as merely pieces of a puzzle baffling and engrossing to the verge of monomania."

There is the whole difficulty about allowing real human beings into a detective-story. At some point or other, either their emotions make hay of the detective interest, or the detective interest gets hold of them and makes their emotions look like pasteboard. It is, of course, a fact that we all adopt a detached attitude towards "a good murder" in the newspaper. Like Betteredge in *The Moonstone,* we get "detective fever," and forget the victim in the fun of tracking the criminal. For this reason, it is better not to pitch the emotional key too high at the start; the inevitable drop is thus made less jarring.

Future Developments: Fashions and Formulae

Just at present, therefore, the fashion in detective fiction is to have characters credible and lively; not conventional, but, on the other hand, not too profoundly studied—people who live more or less on the *Punch* level of emotion. A little more psychological complexity is allowed than formerly; the villain may not be a villain from every point of view; the heroine, if there is one, is not necessarily pure; the falsely accused innocent need not be a sympathetic character.[35] The automata—the embodied vices and virtues—the weeping fair-haired girl—the stupid but manly young man with the biceps—even the colossally evil scientist with the hypnotic eyes—are all disappearing from the intellectual branch of the art, to be replaced by figures having more in common with humanity.

An interesting symptom of this tendency is the arrival of a number of books and stories which recast, under the guise of fiction, actual murder cases drawn from real life. Thus, Mrs. Belloc Lowndes and Mrs. Victor Rickard have both dealt with the Bravo Poisoning Mystery. Anthony Berkeley has retold the Maybrick case; Mr. E. H. W. Meyerstein has published a play based on the Seddon poisoning case, and Mr. Aldous Huxley, in *The Gioconda Smile,* has reinterpreted in his own manner another famous real-life case.[36]

We are now in a position to ask ourselves the favourite question of modern times: What next? Where is the detective-story going? Has it a future? Or will the present boom see the end of it?

The Most Unlikely Person

In early mystery fiction, the problem tends to be, *who* did the crime? At first, while readers were still unsophisticated, the formula of the Most Unlikely Person had a good run. But the reader soon learned to see through this. If there was a single person in the story who appeared to have no motive for the crime and who was allowed to amble through to the penultimate chapter free from any shadow of suspicion, that character became a marked man or woman. "I knew he must be guilty because nothing was said about him," said the cun-

[35] e.g. in J. J. Connington's *The Tragedy at Ravensthorpe,* where the agoraphobic Maurice is by no means an agreeable person to have about the house.

[36] *What Really Happened,* by Mrs. Belloc Lowndes; *Not Sufficient Evidence,* by Mrs. Victor Rickard; *The Wychford Poisoning Drama,* by the Author of *The Layton Court Mystery; Heddon,* by E. H. W. Meyerstein; *Mortal Coils,* by Aldous Huxley.

ning reader. Thus we come to a new axiom, laid down by Mr. G. K. Chesterton in a brilliant essay in the *New Statesman:* the real criminal must be suspected at least once in the course of the story. Once he is suspected, and then (apparently) cleared, he is made safe from future suspicion. This is the principle behind Mr. Wills Crofts' impregnable alibis which are eventually broken down by painstaking enquiry. Probably the most baffling form of detective-story is still that in which suspicion is distributed equally among a number of candidates, one of whom turns out to be guilty. Other developments of the Most Unlikely Person formula make the guilty person a juror at the inquest or trial;[37] the detective himself;[38] the counsel for the prosecution;[39] and, as a supreme effort of unlikeliness, the actual narrator of the story.[40] Finally resort has been made to the double-cross and the person originally suspected turns out to be the right person after all.[41]

The Unexpected Means

There are signs, however, that the possibilities of the formula are becoming exhausted, and of late years much has been done in exploring the solution by the unexpected means. With recent discoveries in medical and chemical science, this field has become exceedingly fruitful, particularly in the provision of new methods of murder. It is fortunate for the mystery monger that, whereas, up to the present, there is only one known way of getting born, there are endless ways of getting killed. Here is a brief selection of handy short cuts to the grave: Poisoned tooth-stoppings; licking poisoned stamps; shaving-brushes inoculated with dread diseases; poisoned boiled eggs (a bright thought); poison-gas; a cat with poisoned claws; poisoned mattresses; knives dropped through the ceiling; stabbing with a sharp icicle; electrocution by telephone; biting by plague-rats and typhoid-carrying lice; boiling lead in the ears (much more effective than cursed hebanon in a vial); air-bubbles injected into the arteries; explosion of a gigantic "Prince Rupert's drop"; frightening to death; hanging head-downwards; freezing to atoms in liquid air; hypodermic injections shot from air-guns; exposure, while insensible, to extreme cold; guns concealed in cameras; a thermometer which

[37] Robert Orr Chipperfield: *The Man in the Jury-Box.*

[38] Bernard Capes: *The Skeleton Key;* Gaston Leroux: *Mystère de la Chambre Jaune;* etc.

[39] G. K. Chesterton: *The Mirror of the Magistrate (Innocence of Father Brown).*

[40] Agatha Christie: *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd.*

[41] Father R. Knox: *The Viaduct Murder,* and others.

xplodes a bomb when the temperature of the room reaches a certain height; and so forth.

The methods of disposing of inconvenient corpses are also varied and peculiar; burial under a false certificate obtained in a number of ways; substitution of one corpse for another (very common in fiction, though rare in real life); mummification; reduction to bone-dust; electro-plating; arson; "planting" (not in the churchyard, but on innocent parties)—a method first made famous by R. L. Stevenson.[42] Thus, of the three questions, "Who?" "How?" and "Why?" "How" is at present the one which offers most scope for surprise and ingenuity, and is capable of sustaining an entire book on its own, though a combination of all three naturally provides the best entertainment.[43]

The mystery-monger's principal difficulty is that of varying his surprises. "You know my methods, Watson," says the detective, and it is only too painfully true. The beauty of Watson was, of course, that after thirty years he still did not know Holmes's methods; but the average reader is sharper-witted. After reading half a dozen stories by one author, he is sufficiently advanced in Dupin's psychological method[44] to see with the author's eyes. He knows that, when Mr. Austin Freeman drowns somebody in a pond full of water-snails, there will be something odd and localised about those snails; he knows that, when one of Mr. Wills Crofts' characters has a cast-iron alibi, the alibi will turn out to have holes in it; he knows that if Father Knox casts suspicion on a Papist, the Papist will turn out to be innocent; instead of detecting the murderer, he is engaged in detecting the writer. That is why he gets the impression that the writer's later books are seldom or never "up to" his earlier efforts. He has become married to the writer's muse, and marriage has destroyed the mystery.

There certainly does seem a possibility that the detective-story will some time come to an end, simply because the public will have learnt all the tricks. But it has probably many years to go yet, and in the meantime a new and less rigid formula will probably have developed, linking it more closely to the novel of manners and separating it more widely from the novel of adventure. The latter will, no doubt, last as long as humanity, and while crime exists, the crime thriller will hold its place. It is, as always, the higher type that is threatened with extinction.

[42] *The Wrong Box.*

[43] Mr. Austin Freeman has specialised in a detective-story which rejects all three questions. He tells the story of the crime first, and relies for his interest on the pleasure afforded by following the ingenious methods of the investigator. *The Singing Bone* contains several tales of this type. Mr. Freeman has had few followers, and appears to have himself abandoned the formula, which is rather a pity.

[44] As outlined in *The Purloined Letter.*

The detective-story is currently profiting by a reaction against novels of the static type. Mr. E. M. Forster is indeed left murmuring regretfully, "Yes, ah! yes—the novel tells a story"; but the majority of the public are rediscovering that fact with cries of triumph. The novel of passion still holds the first place, especially among women, but even women seem to be growing out of the simple love-story. Probably the cheerful cynicism of the detective-tale suits better with the spirit of the times than the sentimentality which ends in wedding bells. For, make no mistake about it, the detective story is part of the literature of escape, and not of expression. We read tales of domestic unhappiness because that is the kind of thing which happens to us; but when these things gall too close to the sore, we fly to mystery and adventure because they do not, as a rule, happen to us. "The detective story," says Philip Guedalla, "is the normal recreation of noble minds." And it is remarkable how strong is the fascination of the higher type of detective-story for the intellectually minded, among writers as well as readers. The average detective-novel to-day is extremely well written, and there are few good living writers who have not tried their hand at it at one time or another.[45]

Tales of Mystery and Horror

Concerning mystery and horror apart from detection, it is more difficult to attempt an historical outline. The early tales in this kind belong to the region of folk-lore rather than of fiction, and are easily available for study. Certain supernatural themes—witchcraft, fairies, vampires, were-wolfs, ghosts friendly and unfriendly, wraiths of the living—appear with comparatively little variation in the traditions of all countries. In modern stories of the weird, we may trace the same themes, rationalised or semi-rationalised, to suit our altered conceptions of the relation between flesh and spirit.

Among recent writers, Dr. M. R. James is one who holds to the older methods. His hauntings are real hauntings, his ghosts and demons have an actual objective reality, and he offers no explanation of their existence. The vampires of E. F. Benson and Marion Crawford, similarly, are real vampires,

[45] Among men of letters distinguished in other lines who have turned their attention to the detective-story may be mentioned A. E. W. Mason, Eden Phillpotts, "Lynn Brock" (whose pseudonym protects the personality of a well-known writer), Somerset Maugham, Rudyard Kipling, A. A. Milne, Father R. Knox, J. D. Beresford.

It is owing to the work of such men as these that the detective-novel reaches a much higher artistic level in England than in any other country. At every turn the quality of the writing and the attention to beauty of form and structure betray the hand of the practised novelist.

isibly and carnally sucking the blood of their victims. To nother school of writers, of whom Algernon Blackwood and obert Hichens may be taken as examples, the ghostly presnce or elemental spirit has become rather the "thought-shell" f an earthbound mind—a record left upon the ether by pasions existing in the past. It possesses, indeed, an objective xistence, but this existence has been bestowed upon it by he power of human thought, and can be dissipated by the ame means. The were-wolf is reinterpreted as the astral body f desire; the radiant energy released by ancient beliefs coninues to vibrate wherever a psychic diaphragm is found to eceive and reproduce it. The study of psychology has proluced in addition a new kind of terror—the nightmare counry between sanity and madness; the pressure of mind upon iving mind, and the lonely horror of the dark places of the oul. In the purely human sphere of horror, spiritual cruelty now holds its place alongside with bodily cruelty, and we can place Ethel Colburn Mayne's *The Separate Room* next door o H. G. Wells's *The Cone* as examples of man's inhumanity to man.

As in every other kind of fiction, so in this: each day the public taste demands a greater subtlety of theme and treatment. The old raw-head-and-bloody-bones, with its apparatus of white sheet and clanking chains, no longer alarms us. It rouses us to ribald laughter, no less than the marvels of Otranto, and the statue from whose nose three drops of blood slowly and solemnly fall. Nor are we impressed by descriptions of hair standing on end with terror, or by flat-footed emphasis on the ghastly helped out with exclamation marks. It needs to-day the utmost cunning of the writer's craft to "put across" a ghost-story; the slightest touch of sentimentality or exaggeration is fatal to success.

In nothing is individual fancy so varied and capricious as in its perception of the horrible. To one person, E. L. White's *Lukundoo* is terrible beyond all imagination; to another, this story seems merely grotesque. One cannot argue about these things. I remember reading somewhere about an old sundial, around whose face was written: IT IS LATER THAN YOU THINK. If that motto does not give you a "cauld grue," then nothing that I or any other person can say will convince you of its soul-shaking ghastliness.

It remains to be added that many tales which I would have liked to include have had to be left out of the present book for one unavoidable reason or another. Space has necessitated the neglect of the whole vast field of foreign literature, in order that something like a representative selection of English tales might be attempted. Difficulties connected with copy-

right have caused a few regrettable omissions. Sometimes, also a many times reprinted masterpiece has been deliberately passed over in favour of something less readily available. And finally, many lacunæ must be attributed to ignorance, madam—pure ignorance on the editor's part.

It is hoped, however, that in running through the present volume, the reader will find himself presented with a kind of bird's-eye view of the general subject. Every tale in this book is guaranteed to have puzzled or horrified *somebody;* with any luck at all, some of them may puzzle and horrify *you.*

What a piece of work is man, that he should enjoy this kind of thing!

A very odd piece of work—indeed, a mystery!

DOROTHY L. SAYERS

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D.L.S.

Marie Belloc Lowndes

HER LAST ADVENTURE

1924

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1

THE RAILWAY CARRIAGE door was flung open, a man sprang up the steps, and his porter began putting two Gladstone bags in the rack.

Eva Bude rose from her seat, words of protest forming themselves on her lips; for this railway carriage on the boat train had been reserved in order that she, and the junior partner of the firm who employed her as their Paris buyer, might have an important business talk on the way to London. But he had not turned up after all, and—she had seen the face of the stranger light up, as his glance had first rested on her singularly attractive-looking self.

"Will you forgive my intrusion?" he asked, in a full, caressing voice. "The train is absolutely full!"

There hovered on her lips the words: "I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to leave the carriage, if the person I am expecting arrives at the last moment."

But the words were never uttered, for the train was already in motion. A moment later the tall, dark stranger had come over to her side of the carriage and, sitting down opposite to her, he had said something which had at once amused, thrilled, and yes, allured her.

There came a time when Eva Bude made a serious attempt to reconstitute, in her own mind, everything that had happened on what became retrospectively a memorable journey. Why had she, in the first place, allowed an unknown man to share her solitude? And, above all, why had she so soon "made friends" with him?

Was it because she had just spent a week among foreigners,

who, though they showed her every courtesy, and even a considerable measure of admiration, yet regarded her, as Frenchmen are apt to regard a woman who works, in an entirely impersonal fashion? That, no doubt, had been one reason, the other—she knew it well enough—lay deep in the roots of her peculiar temperament and nature. The long level glance which her fellow-traveller, as he leapt up into the railway carriage, had cast at her, had held in it that mysterious, beckoning appeal, for which she was half consciously always watching and to which she was almost always prepared to grant a measure of response.

As to the first words he had uttered after the train had started, they were words which she had heard many times uttered in her life of thirty-six years, and which she never wearied of hearing. Those words were: "I hope you will forgive me for saying that I think you the most beautiful woman I have ever seen!"

As for the man—his name was James Malton—he had just gone through a terrible experience which had shaken his nerve, and which, in spite of his determined effort to obliterate it from his mind, kept leaping back to his memory. He was shortly going to leave England, he believed for ever, and he was thirsting for some form of romantic adventure which would make the immediate past seem remote, and give him something delightful to remember during what he believed would be a dull, if pleasant and cloudless, future.

Given the mood of each of those fellow-travellers, it was perhaps not so very strange, after all, that long before they reached their journey's end each knew as much concerning the other as was necessary for their good understanding. But whereas the woman believed she knew everything that was worth knowing concerning her exceedingly attractive companion, all the man had learnt about his new friend was that she was a childless widow.

Neither of them had touched on the sordid question of money. That the lady was well off had become at once apparent to Malton, for she was admirably dressed in the sort of clothes that he knew too much about women not to know meant wealth of a sort. Then, if her string of real pearls was unobtrusive, the pearls were perfectly matched; and the only other jewel worn by her was a valuable emerald ring.

Though Malton was both a clever man, and a shrewd man, he came to several quite wrong conclusions during their long and apparently intimate talk.

Whereas he had told her that he had just sold his share in a house-agent's business, and that he owned an attractive little property not far from Dover, she, on her side, had refrained from giving him any hint as to her circumstances,

nd it was only with reluctance and hesitation that she had mitted to the Christian name of Eva, and the curious sur- me of Bude.

Yet such friends did they become that, by the time their in was nearing Victoria Station, Mrs. Bude had agreed to ine with Malton at the Trocadero on the following Tuesday.

She had, however, impressed upon him the fact that she ust leave before midnight. He had felt it something of a iumph when she had at last consented, somewhat timorously, o give him her telegraphic address of "Bonako, Frampton-on- hames," while making him give his word of honour that he ould not try to find out her address. He had eagerly given hat assurance, and it was somewhat surprising, considering what sort of man he was, that he meant to keep his word. But he had no particular wish to know where Mrs. Bude lived. All he wished was to be so far in touch with her as to be able o communicate with her by telegram when it suited him.

As the train slowed down, she held out her hand, "I shall e really grateful, Mr. Malton," she gave him a roguish smile, if you will go straight away, and not give yourself any trouble ver me, or over my luggage!"

Malton realised that she meant what she said, and though he muttered a word of protest, he was glad to get away quickly from the station.

As he hailed a taxi, and threw the driver the address of an acquaintance who was always willing to take him as a paying guest, he told himself that his luck was indeed in! Nothing could have made him believe this morning that anything could happen that day which, for over two hours, would completely distract his mind from a terrible secret ordeal he had been through the night before.

Even so, it seemed a long time to Tuesday, but though he had made an effort to persuade Mrs. Bude to say that she would dine with him to-night, she had been adamant in her refusal.

Most of the woman whom Malton attracted—and being a natural Don Juan, he had attracted a great many women on his road through life—had been gentle, malleable women. But this, his latest conquest, was evidently made of stronger metal.

There are more respectable people in the world than people who are not respectable suppose. On the other hand there are infinitely more lawless men and women in the world than law-abiding folk believe. Eva Bude was only ashamed of certain hidden phases of her life because of a public opinion she at once feared and despised; as for her new friend, he had very early in his life joined the herd of human rogue elephants.

2

"I should feel myself such a hypocrite, Eva!"

The words were said in a low, troubled voice, and the woman who uttered them was Mrs. Bude's one real friend of her own sex. They had known each other from childhood; they had been schoolmates, and though circumstances had parted them comparatively early in life, they had always kept in touch.

Now they were both widowed, but Agnes Harsham was poor, and she had four children, so she was compelled to live with her mother-in-law in the Channel Islands.

Mrs. Harsham was in London, for the first time for years, and she was spending one of her few precious days with her old friend Eva Bude, in Eva's delightful, luxuriously furnished cottage, at Frampton-on-Thames.

After a delicious little dinner, they were sitting in the rose-scented garden, and both in the mood for confidences; so Eva had told her friend what the other had thought to be an astounding fact about herself and her way of life.

"A hypocrite! Why that? I do a man's work; I make a man's income; and I choose to lead a man's life. It's a rotten convention which forces women to be what is called 'good,' while giving every kind of license to men!"

"And does no one ever suspect, Eva?"

The woman who asked that question was small, fragile, worn-looking. As a girl she had been very attractive, but now she appeared middle-aged, though she was only thirty-four. Her thin, pale face wore an eager, excited, and yes, rather ashamed expression, as she waited for the other's answer.

"No one has ever suspected, and no one ever will suspect."

Eva Bude put out her lovely, exquisitely kept hand, and touched the trunk of the tree under which they were sitting. "Though perhaps I ought to touch wood! You see, I don't lead a double life, Agnes. I lead a triple life. First comes my working life, and I allow nothing to interfere with *that*. I see Mr. Milman once or twice a week, and then, as you know, I go four or five times a year to Paris."

A look flashed into the other's face. "Oh, Paris?"

Her friend shook her head impatiently. "Certainly not!" she rapped out. "When I'm in Paris I'm much too busy to think of anything but my work. Besides, it's a great mistake to suppose that because one's in France, one can do anything one likes. French people, as a matter of fact, are awfully prudish. Why I very seldom even lunch or dine out with a man

when I'm there! Yet I'm known in every one of the big luxury trades in France as *'la Belle Madame Bude,'* " and she laughed gaily.

"I don't wonder at that," said Mrs. Harsham sincerely. "But, Eva? Tell me about your other two lives."

"Well, there's my life here, at Frampton. Though I'm a good deal away, I've kept up my tennis, and I've become quite keen on golf; also, I'm on two local women's committees. They simply *made* me come on—one of them concerns child welfare," and there was a note of triumph in her voice.

"I suppose you have very few real friends?" said the other slowly.

Eva Bude leant forward. "I wonder if you'll believe me, Agnes, when I tell you that I've never had any woman friend but you?"

Agnes Harsham put out her thin, worn hand. "Of course I've always known that, in a way—"

"You're the only person in the world to whom I could speak as I am speaking now, for all you're so prim and respectable."

"You haven't told me anything yet about your third life," Eva's one friend said in a low voice. She had felt touched, and strangely moved, by the other's words.

"There isn't much to tell, my dear! As you know, my work takes me about a good deal, and now and again, off and on"—she hesitated a moment, then exclaimed lightly—"I meet a man in whom I feel, oh—it's so difficult to explain—a sort of romantic interest."

Her voice dropped, as she went on: "Of course, I'm careful. I seldom make a mistake; also, of course, there's plenty of choice."

The other gazed at her bewildered. "D'you mean that there are a lot of men always going about looking for an adventure?" she asked incredulously.

Eva Bude laughed aloud—a ringing laugh of amusement and kindly contempt. "What sort of life can you have led, my poor dear, not to have found *that* out? But still, I confess"—she hesitated again, while the other looked at her in the now deepening twilight with keen curiosity. "I confess," Eva repeated, "that I do like a touch of real romance. I mean I should hate anything sordid."

Agnes Harsham said slowly: "You're a brave woman, Eva. I should be so horribly afraid of the possible consequences."

Then, when she saw a grin zig-zag across the other's face she cried: "You don't understand what I mean! What I should be afraid of, were I you, would be that when the affair is over, the man wouldn't give me up."

"My dear Agnes! Surely you don't think I let my temporary

hero know anything about me? It doesn't often happen tha I even let him know my name. Also, I always play fair. M partner in the game is told, very early in our friendship, tha he will soon have to draw his wickets."

She waited a moment, then went on: "Don't misunderstan me, Agnes. I'm not always doing that sort of thing. Some times months go by—once it was nearly two years."

The other said, under her breath, "I see," but she was mor bewildered than ever.

"And I'll tell you something else which may surprise you my dear. I've now made up my mind to give up—well, Ro mance with a big R."

"You have?"

"One more little adventure, and then I settle down to abso lute respectability."

"Does that mean that you are thinking of marrying again?

"Clever girl! Perhaps it does. But if I do marry again, I'l marry a good man—the sort of man who doesn't even know the sort of thing exists which we've been talking about."

"Eva! You *are* a queer woman."

She said mockingly: "Am I? Don't reformed rakes alway try and marry good, simple girls?"

"Do tell me about him; I know you've someone in your mind."

"I have, in a way. He's a friend of the Milmans, and though he's rich and good-looking too, what I like about him, my dear, is that he's a man of character without being *too* 'pi. If I do marry him, I'll make him a thoroughly good wife However, it's almost indecent to talk about that, as I'm on the eve of my last little fling."

3

Eva Bude stood up in the big, open motor, and gazed over the great expanse of shimmering blue sea to her right. Far away, some miles down the coast, lay Dover. But here, on the white road cut through a ledge of the Downs, they might have been a hundred miles from a town.

"This is absolutely perfect," she cried delightedly, and the man by whom she had been sitting, seized her left hand and squeezed it so hard that it almost hurt. It was a hot July day, and the London they had left three hours ago—for Eva hated motoring too fast—had been like a furnace.

Malton, too, felt in exultantly high spirits. Though his dark, handsome face bore the marks of strain, and his bright brown

eyes signs of sleeplessness, he looked as if, at last, life had given him what he had been seeking for always.

Again and again during their long drive he had congratulated himself on his marvellous good fortune. He had only three days more of England left, but they would be perfect days, spent not only with the most physically perfect, but also with the most mentally alluring woman it had ever been his luck to meet.

As she sank down into the comfortable cushioned seat, he slipped his arm round her.

"Darling!" he exclaimed. "Darling, darling, *darling!*"

"Don't be silly, Jim." But she said the words very kindly. She, too, was in an exultant mood, determined to enjoy every halcyon moment of her last adventurous journey into the kingdom of illicit romance. Her present companion had laid a strange, potent spell, if not on her heart, then on her senses, during their brief acquaintance. In a way she was glad that he was leaving England for ever.

"We shall be there in about ten minutes from now, sweetheart. You won't mind there being nobody to wait on you?"

In a low, ardent voice, he added, "I'll wait on you, my lovely perfect, goddess."

She answered merrily: "I'm not afraid of housework, Jim; and though I say it, I'm a really good cook!"

"It's far too hot for cooking. Besides, I've brought everything we're likely to want."

And his eyes rested contentedly on the huge hamper which stood on the two seats in front of them.

He was telling himself, with a touch of real sentiment, how different the future would look to him if the woman he was going to marry within ten days or a fortnight from now, the enormously rich Canadian widow whom he had met by chance in a Bournemouth hotel two months ago, resembled in even the slightest degree the woman he now held closely pressed to his side. Still, no man can expect to have all the luck! His future wife was not actively repulsive, and she certainly adored him. They would lead a very pleasant, if placid, existence on her large income, and he would keep away from his one fatal temptation—the gambling table.

"There's 'The Folly,' " he said suddenly, and Eva, turning round quickly, was surprised to see that he had become darkly red. She told herself, with a touch of tenderness, that he was an odd, emotional creature.

Malton called out to the chauffeur: "It's the first turn to the left but you'll have to be somewhat careful, for it's only a rough track, as well as very steep."

The man, who had been promised a big tip, called back

cheerily: "I'll manage all right sir, never fear! I've been in worse places than this with my car."

Halfway up the bare, almost cliff-like hill to their left, a curious-looking white house stood in an oasis of greenery.

Eva's large violet eyes, those eyes so beautiful and dove-like in their softness when looking at a lover—yet which were so quick to see what to many women would pass unnoticed, travelled slowly over the great expanse of short turfed down which lay below the little property for which they were bound.

"What a strange, lonely place to choose for a house!" she exclaimed. And then, "It must have cost a tremendous lot of money to build it up there, even in the good old days before the war. It doesn't look a bit English," she went on thoughtfully, "in fact, I once saw a house near Monte Carlo which looked almost exactly like this house."

He was amused and pleased. How sharp and clever she was!

"As a matter of fact, you've hit the bull's eye. 'The Folly' is a copy of an Italian villa. It was built about fifty years ago by the father of the man who owns it now."

"I thought you said it belonged to you," she said quickly.

"Well, it's been practically mine for the last ten years, for the owner lives in Italy. Now and again we've managed"—he corrected himself quickly—"*I've* managed to get it let. But it's far too lonely to please the sort of people who generally want a house by the seaside."

A sudden bend in the lane brought them just below the villa, and Eva saw that the actual building was of white stone, though the terrace, which was its most arresting architectural feature, was of marble.

The terrace was supported by wide substantial brick arches, and through the arches could be seen the windows of what was apparently the ground floor of this unusual looking dwelling.

"It must be a very dark basement," she said musingly.

"Far too dark to be of any use," he said quickly.

Then, more slowly he added, "The last people who were here were American, and they insisted on having what they called a kitchenette made out of a small room beyond the dining-room. They shut up the basement altogether, and it's not been opened again. There's a good little oil stove in the kitchenette, quite good enough for any cooking we're likely to want to do."

He let his voice drop. "We'll live on bread and cheese and kisses," he whispered.

She looked round at him. "Very few men would really care to do that!" she exclaimed drily.

A few moments later Eva Bude was springing up the broad

ow shallow stone steps which led to the banked up platform n to which the second storey of the villa opened.

From the hanging gardens to her right floated the delicious cent of roses and jasmine and, turning round, she caught er breath at the loveliness of the scene spread out below, or the setting sun made a golden path across the pale sea.

Malton opened the high front door, and his companion noced that the Yale lock was a new lock.

As soon as they had passed through into the curious, foreign-looking round hall, Malton hurried over to the French window opening on to the terrace, and flung it open.

But Eva stood still, looking about her. She admired the frescoed walls which formed so suitable a background to the ivory-inlaid ebony table which stood on the marble floor. Her work had taught her to be appreciative of beauty in every form.

"It's wonderful," she murmured, "wonderful! We might be hundreds of miles from England."

"I wish the man would hurry up with the hamper," said Malton impatiently. "We may as well start our honeymoon with a bottle of fizz!"

His words jarred on her. This strange and lovely house had brought back to her memory an Italian who had loved her for a longer time than she generally allowed any man to love her. He would never have said a thing like that. Also, with dismay, she realised that Malton looked tired, haggard, and, what she had never seen him yet, ill-tempered.

"He won't be a moment," she said soothingly; and he muttered, "I'll go and get the glasses and the wire-cutter."

He opened a pale, grey-painted door, and she followed him into the spacious drawing-room. There was a slight feeling of airlessness there, and this time it was she who flung open one of the three French windows. Then she turned round to find that her lover had disappeared.

The drawing-room pleased Eva less than the hall had done. The furniture, of carved wood and gilt, was Italian, and upholstered in green damask which had faded in patches. She made up her mind that only the sofa would be comfortable —the chairs were too like thrones. The carpet, of a cheap, British-made variety, swore with the rest of the room.

Malton reappeared, and Eva laughed joyously, for he looked so funny, carrying a tray with three glasses on it.

Her laugh proved infectious; his good temper came back. "I want the chap who drove us down to have a drink of the bubbly, too," he exclaimed. "I'm sure he's earned it!" And she answered: "Indeed he has."

The chauffeur, a merry-eyed little Cockney, stood in the

hall, waiting by the luggage, and the big hamper. "It was a bit of a tug getting that up," he observed.

Malton opened the hamper, and took out one of six bottl of champagne. "Now then!" he exclaimed, cutting the wir Carefully twisting out the cork he filled up the three b glasses to the brim.

"I think we ought to eat something with this," observed th one lady of the party.

A moment later a cake stood on the round table, and th same knife which had severed the strong cords binding th top of the hamper, was cutting the cake.

"I don't want you to go your way zig-zagging back t town," said Malton cheerily, and the chauffeur grinned. "N fear of that, sir!"

Eva only drank a quarter of the champagne which ha fallen to her share. She was an abstemious woman, we aware of how much of her now mature beauty was due t her own good sense and care.

She felt just a little sorry to see—after the chauffeur ha departed with his big tip, and order for his return in thre days' time—Malton empty her glass.

4

Again and again during the three days spent by her at th villa, Eva Bude told herself that till this, her last secr adventure, had been in being, she had never known what lif in its perfection could be.

She and Jim Malton appeared to be the perfect comple ment the one of the other. Every waking hour brought som new delightful proof of how well they were attuned. The walked, they gardened, they talked, they made love. . . She was completely under his spell; he held her enthralled.

Small wonder that when the time came, she found herse counting the hours, measuring the minutes, almost the mo ments, of their last complete day.

They worked in the garden all the morning really hard. Bu they lazed the afternoon away on the terrace. Both felt heavy hearted at the thought of tomorrow's parting.

For the first time a hawker called at the house, and once they saw a group of walkers on the path which edged the cliff far, far below; and the sight seemed so surprising tha she turned to him and said: "This is an astonishingly lonely place, Jim, only fit——"

Catching her thought as it flew, he cried: "——for lovers!"

A moment later he exclaimed, "I wish to God we had set-

ed to stay here a week. You won't let me telegraph to Deauville?"

It was for Deauville that he was leaving on the morrow.

She shook her head. "Oh, no; I've got a lot of business waiting for me in London," and then she sighed.

It was her first sigh. She would not allow herself to indulge in a second.

Early the next morning, just after sunrise, she awoke to see her lover bending over her.

His face was blanched, and a thrill of terror ran through her. "What's the matter?" she asked, sitting up.

"Don't you hear a noise downstairs?" he murmured affrightedly; and he gripped her arm with such force that she bore the mark of the clutch for days.

She listened intently. "No, I hear nothing, Jim."

"Listen!"

And then she did hear—curious stuffless sounds coming up from the garden below.

"It's only some animal, a sheep probably," she murmured, "I think it's got into that queer tin garden-room, near the back door."

She saw an expression of intense relief swept over his haggard face.

"Perhaps it *is* a sheep," he whispered back.

But all at once there came the sounds of a door opening and shutting.

"You're right! Someone's gone into the basement," she exclaimed. "But how can they have opened the door, if, as you say, Jim, it's always kept locked?"

Malton's face was dusky. He was evidently convulsed with fear, and Eva felt a little amused, and yes, a little disgusted, too.

"It may be that hawker who came yesterday. Those sort of people hate sleeping out of doors. In any case I'll go down and see who it is." She added, "I'm not a bit afraid."

She was putting on her silk dressing-gown as she spoke, "How do I get down?" she asked, in a rather peremptory tone.

Malton was staring at her, still obviously unmanned.

"Perhaps it *is* that hawker," he murmured. And then, "Somehow I don't like your going downstairs all by yourself. Yet—yet I don't feel I *can* go down there."

"One gets down through that locked door in the dining-room, doesn't one?" she said quickly. "Where is the key kept?"

"I've got it here, somewhere."

She was surprised to see him get up and walk, uncertainly, to a locked chest of drawers.

As he handed her the key, he muttered, "I wonder if you'd better go down to the basement?"

She made no answer to that. Instead, she ran down to the dining-room, and put the key in the lock of the door which he had once told her led to the lower storey.

The door opened straight on to a dark steep wooden staircase, and, treading cautiously, she made her way down, down, down, till she reached the large disused kitchen.

It was very dark there, though a little of the fresh morning light filtered in between the broad arches.

Eva looked with aversion at the rusty kitchen range; and then, standing still, she listened intently.

Yes, there was certainly someone moving about next door, in what had once probably been a servants' hall.

"Who's there?" she called out boldly.

The cobwebbed door between the two rooms swung open and a small, still boyish-looking man advanced towards her while a refined voice exclaimed: "I'm awfully sorry madam to have disturbed you. I haven't had any food since yesterday morning, so I'm terribly hungry. Don't be frightened. I'm not a burglar, though I fear I look like one."

"How did you get in?" she asked.

And then, in the pale light filtering in through the dirty window, she saw that the tramp smiled.

"I went into that queer little tin house you've got in the garden," he answered. "And behind the door I found a bunch of keys. I couldn't help hoping that one of them would fit the back door to this house—and it did!"

"I see."

She felt relieved. No harm in this poor little chap. And then for she was a good-hearted woman, she said in a concerned tone: "You do look bad. If you'll wait here a minute, I'll go upstairs and get you something to eat, and to drink, too."

He said gratefully: "You *are* kind."

For a moment she thought of asking him to come up with her. She would have done so, had she been alone in the house, for she was a fearless woman. But the thought of Malton stopped her; not that she wanted to think just then of Malton, for his attack of nerves had shocked her. Even so, she had become aware, during their short acquaintance, that he was a highly sensitive and nervous man, in spite of his air of virile strength.

She ran quickly up both flights of stairs, and opened the door behind which she found Malton waiting for her, still with an expression of craven fear on his face.

"It's all right! Only a hungry tramp. I'm giving him a bit of meat, and some bread and butter."

She hastened down into the little kitchenette where she had

spent happy moments during the three days, doing odd bits of cooking, mostly of the fresh egg variety. Now she put some meat, a generous hunk of bread, and a quarter of a pound of butter on a tray, together with a bottle of beer.

Once more she made her way down the sombre deep stairway to the basement, and as, turning again into the dark kitchen, she put down the tray on a table near the window, she was woman enough to feel flattered at her unbidden guest's look of mingled gratitude and admiration.

As he fell to, ravenously, she noticed that his hands were white, and that he used his knife and fork like an educated man.

"What brought you to this pass?" she asked suddenly. "What sort of work is it that you can do?"

In reply he told her that he had been a medical student in his first term at the outbreak of war, and that he had at once joined up. Twice he had been badly wounded, and after the Armistice his physical condition had made it out of the question for him to study medicine. He had foolishly commuted his pension, and now he was penniless.

"There's an old friend of my father's living in Dover," he concluded, "I think he may help me to get some writing work."

He got up. "You have been a sport!" he exclaimed. "The more so that I'm afraid I gave you a fright."

"Well, yes, you did. The basement hasn't been used for ever so long," she said lightly. "We have a tiny kitchen upstairs."

He gave her a quick, rather peculiar look. "Someone's been cooking down here lately," he said thoughtfully. "There's a nasty smell in the next room. Would you like me to clean out the place for you?"

"Oh, no! I expect it's only a dead rat." She held out her hand. "Good-bye, and good luck!"

"The same to you," he said cordially. Then, turning, he limped across the wide kitchen.

"You'll shut the outer door and put the keys back where you found them?" she called out, just as he disappeared through the door.

He made no answer, but she could not doubt that he had heard.

She found Malton in the kitchenette busy preparing breakfast. "What I can't make out," he said uneasily, "is how the chap got in."

When she had told him he struck his right hand against the palm of his left.

"How could I have been such a fool!" he exclaimed. "But I haven't thought of that bunch of keys since—well——" he hesitated a moment, "the last tenants left."

When she came down again, dressed, the now sun-filled, tiny kitchen was empty. "Jim," she called out, "Jim! Where are you?"

But there came no answering cry of jovial welcome, and she sat down alone and ate her breakfast.

Then, all at once, Malton was there, in the doorway, a bunch of rusty keys in his hand. He looked moody, preoccupied, troubled, and she, too, felt heavy-hearted. "Our last morning," she said with a sigh.

"I can't make any key fit the back door," he said abruptly, "I've tried them all, over and over again. I thought one of them *was* the right key, but it won't turn in the lock."

"I'm certain I could make it work," she said impatiently. After all the matter was of no importance.

"Give me a little of that salad oil. It will be all right once I've oiled the rust off it."

His face cleared, as he watched her rub up the key he had detached from the ring.

She gave him a little oil in a cup, and he refused, rather curtly, to let her come too.

Off he went again, but soon he came back. "No! It's not the right key. You don't think that young chap could have taken it off the ring and gone off with it?"

She stared at him, surprised. "What possible reason could he have had to do such a thing? He may have wrenched the lock in some way when turning the key. Old locks are queer things."

Malton made no further allusion to the matter, but three times during that long morning she heard him going round the garden to the door which gave access to the basement. And each time, as he came back, she saw by his vexed, preoccupied look that he had met with disappointment.

The day had opened for them both too early, as well as badly, and she felt tired, and out of spirits.

For the first time since they had exchanged that long beckoning look in the railway carriage where had begun their strange, ardent friendship, Eva Bude felt as if Jim Malton were a stranger. She had completely lost the adoring lover who was also an admiring friend. He was now cold, preoccupied, absent-minded.

Being the manner of woman she was, Eva had made up her mind to leave everything in perfect order.

Malton watched her with a look of cynical amusement. "I don't suppose there'll be anyone here again for years," he exclaimed brusquely, "Why give yourself so much trouble?"

The motor was late, and he paced about the sunny rooms, nervously afraid of missing the boat for France. At last, however, it arrived and, as her companion locked the front door,

Eva Bude stood gazing over the sea, wishing Malton had not spoilt, by his strange moodiness, the last morning of her last adventure.

As they drove quickly to Dover they had the car closed, for neither he nor she wished anyone to see them.

It was a strange, silent drive, but when they drew up near the jetty, he crushed her to him with something of his old ardour, and tears started to her beautiful eyes.

She waited till the boat started, and then she brushed her tears away, and, as she drove on, alone, there came over her a sincere feeling of relief that she had now done, for ever, with the secret joys and dangers of lawless love.

5

"A gentleman for you, ma'am. I think he said his name was Eaton."

Mrs. Bude turned round quickly from her writing-table, and there ran through her mind just a very slight sensation of discomfort and surprise. She knew no one of the name of Eaton, she was not expecting a caller, and she was very busy.

It was the first of September, and a great deal had happened in the two months which had elapsed since she had come back from the short holiday Mr. Milman had willingly granted to his highly valued buyer.

Poor Mr. Milman! He was as yet happily unconscious of the fact that Mrs. Bude was going to give him notice on the morrow.

Eva had accepted this morning an offer of marriage from the man of whom she had spoken to her friend Agnes Harsham. And she was writing to Agnes now, telling her the great news.

When the maid opened the door she had just written the words:

> "I am happier than I thought it possible any human being could ever be in this drab world. Harry is an angel, and he thinks me one, too! I know you think me a hard, worldly woman, Agnes, but I would still marry Harry if he became ruined to-morrow. You will laugh at me, but I feel, now, that, I know for the first time what *real* love is, and can be. I feel like a girl, a lovely, pure, innocent girl, rejoicing in her first love——"

"As you didn't say you was expecting anyone, ma'am, I left the gentleman in the hall," went on the well-trained maid.

"Show him in," said Mrs. Bude quickly.

A moment later she was shaking hands with her visitor, and deciding quickly in her own mind that he was a professional man of good stamp.

She also told herself wordlessly that he was ill at ease. Indeed for a moment or two he did not say anything. He simply stood gazing at her fixedly, and there was no touch of the admiration to which she was accustomed in the quiet keen glance.

It was she who at last broke a silence which had become oppressive.

"May I enquire why you wish to see me?" she asked suavely.

He answered at once, in quick, incisive tones. "I have come on what I am afraid is unpleasant business, Mrs. Bude."

"Unpleasant business?" she echoed.

The colour rushed into her face. Everything in her business life was absolutely above board.

In the world in which she moved, and where she held so high and secure a place, there were both men and women who sometimes talked, half jokingly, of the ways in which they could "bilk" the income tax. But she, Eva Bude, always said, and it was true, "I put *everything* in—though, of course, I keep a very exact record of my expenses!"

There came such a look of real astonishment and troubled perplexity on the lovely face now turned enquiringly towards him, that Mr. Eaton felt that perhaps the carefully-built-up story, the truth of which he had come to probe, might be going to turn out, at any rate inasmuch as it concerned this charming lady, a mare's nest.

And though the way of his life made him, if not exactly a hard man, then a man whom it was almost impossible to surprise, so familiar had he become with the astonishing tricks and strange turns of our poor fallible human nature, her feminine charm so far affected him that he began to hope that a mistake had been made.

Everything he knew about Mrs. Bude—and he had learnt a great deal about her in the last few days—was entirely to her credit. Her name was widely known and respected in that branch of the wholesale trade where she was so successful, and though she was there known as "the beautiful Mrs. Bude," there had apparently never been a word against her character.

"Do sit down," she said courteously.

He sat down; and then, after a pause, he asked what he knew to be a crucial question: "May I take it, Mrs. Bude, that your telegraphic address is 'Bonako, Frampton'?"

"Yes." she said quickly. "What of it?"

She saw his face change, and a slight tremor of fear came over her.

He opened his black attaché case, and, taking out of it a telegraph form, handed it to her. She read:

"Copy.
The Old Cottage, Frampton-on-Thames. Handed in at Dover, 3.25, delivered Frampton, 4.17, July 3rd.
The motor meets you Waterloo three o'clock to-morrow.—JIM."

She stared down at the piece of paper with a feeling of terror in her heart. Could this mean—it must mean—that she was about to be cited as co-respondent in a divorce case? That Malton's account of himself had been a lie from beginning to end; that he was not a widower, but a married man; and that his wife had had him watched?

Suddenly she remembered the tramp! *He* must have been the detective who had tracked them down. Mr. Eaton was, of course, a solicitor. How stupid of her not to have guessed it sooner. Still she might, even so, manage to keep out of the case.

"I did receive that telegram," she said at last, in a low voice, and looking down as she spoke.

"Do you admit having motored in the company of one James Malton, to a house called 'The Folly,' some eight miles from Dover?"

She said: "Am I bound to answer that question?" and moistened her lips with her tongue nervously.

He made no reply to that for a few moments, and she added, "I suppose you are Mrs. Malton's solicitor?"

"*Mrs.* Malton?" he repeated questioningly. "I do not think she has an English lawyer."

Then he said, in a firm impressive tone, "I think it best to be frank with you, Mrs. Bude. I belong to the Criminal Investigation Department at Scotland Yard."

To his amazement he saw a look of relief flash over her face.

Eva Bude was a clever and a well-informed woman, but even so, she supposed, in her ignorance, that Scotland Yard, among its other attributes, has that of taking a hand in obtaining evidence with regard to divorce cases. So it was a great relief to her to learn that she was not dealing with a private firm of solicitors, or, worse still, with a private firm of detectives. It was within her knowledge that a high official at Scotland Yard had been very kind, with regard to a difficult and delicate matter concerning a case of blackmail. She also knew that the person who had received valuable assistance had been an attractive woman, though not nearly as attractive as she, Eva, was herself.

Tears—how amazed her visitor would have been had he

realised that they were tears of relief!—began trickling down her cheeks.

"I was only at 'The Folly,' three days," she whispered, "and if it's ever found out, I mean if I'm brought into a horrible divorce case, it will be my ruin, Mr. Eaton, not only as a business woman——"

And then she stopped; she would not mention her engagement unless she were driven to it.

"I have been a widow many years. I was very lonely——"

She stopped again, aware that he was looking at her with a thoughtful, measuring glance, as if wondering whether she were really telling him the truth.

Desperately she went on. "Surely, *surely*, you can do something to help me? Surely, especially now, it won't be necessary for my name to appear in the papers? I have often read in divorce cases the phrase 'an unknown woman.' "

He said suddenly: "How long had you known James Malton, Mrs. Bude? I suppose your acquaintance with him was of short standing?"

She bowed her head. Feelings of acute, agonising shame seemed to envelop her as in tongues of fire.

"I—I can't remember exactly when I did first meet him," she faltered; and at once he knew that she was not telling the truth.

"Try and remember," he said coldly.

She looked at him pleadingly. "What is it I ought to remember?"

And the half-appeal went home. Mr. Eaton was beginning to feel very sorry for this beautiful woman.

"I will be honest with you, Mrs. Bude. We know a great deal about Malton, but we do not know whether your acquaintance with the man was of long standing. Whether, for instance, you had ever been to 'The Folly' in his company before?"

"Never," she said eagerly. "Never! I swear it! It was the first time I had ever done anything of that kind."

Again her eyes dropped before his passionless scrutiny.

"Then I may take it that your acquaintance with Malton was of very short duration?"

Reluctantly, very reluctantly, she murmured, "Yes."

"You were abroad on business from the 9th to the 19th of June. May I assume that you had not yet met James Malton before you went to Paris?"

She made no answer for what seemed to them both a very long time. Should she lie, or should she admit the truth?

The fact that Mr. Eaton was a Scotland Yard official made up her mind for her. Wisely—far more wisely than she knew—she decided for the truth.

"I met him," she said, in a strangled voice, "on my journey

home that time. I mean during the railway journey from Dover to London."

Again he glanced at his book. "I see. A fortnight almost to a day before you and he went to the house called 'The Folly' together?"

She felt too humiliated, too ashamed, to do more than bend her head.

"And now," he said, "we come to certain events which occurred while you were at 'The Folly.'"

She looked at him dumbly. To what events could he be referring? Nothing had happened which could possibly be called an "event" during those three days.

He opened a note-book. "Early on the morning of July the sixth a tramp effected an entrance into the basement of the house. As a matter of fact he was looking for food. You heard the sounds made by him, and you came downstairs in your dressing-gown. Then you went upstairs and procured him some food. You told him that the basement had not been used for a long time, and then he commented on the fact that there was a peculiar odour in the scullery. You answered that it was probably caused by a dead rat."

Eva Bude stared at her visitor. What an astonishing thing that those few idle words which she had quite forgotten, but which she now recalled, should be repeated to her now!

Again she told herself that the man who had so imposed on her good nature had, of course, been a detective.

"Yes, I remember his coming quite well," she said with quivering lip.

"The young man—his name is Skinner—locked the back door behind him. *But he took away the key.* A week ago he went back to the house, and a certain suspicion he had formed when he was there before was confirmed by him. Quite properly he then went to the Dover police station."

She said uncertainly: "Why did he do that? There was no one there when he went again—was there?"

He looked at her significantly. "On the occasion of Mr. Skinner's second visit there was no one alive in the house."

He slightly accentuated the word "alive."

As she said nothing, only looked at him with puzzled, frightened eyes, he asked another, and a final, question. "I suppose you had no occasion to go again into the basement of the house, Mrs. Bude?"

The colour rushed into her face. "I was only in the basement that one time. It's quite cut off from the rest of the house. What little cooking I had occasion to do was done on an oil stove in a little room upstairs."

She was becoming more and more bewildered. Yet the turn

this curious conversation had taken was giving her a measure of comfort and re-assurance.

She realised, now, that no ordinary divorce case could be in question.

Suddenly her visitor leant forward.

"I am afraid," he said very gravely, "that I am going to give you a great shock, Mrs. Bude."

The colour had come back into her face; for she was beginning to see that the mystery concerned not herself, but either young Skinner or James Malton.

Mr. Eaton opened out a piece of paper he held in his hand. "I have here a plan of the basement."

She got up and bent over the paper, while he, pointing with a pencil, observed, "Here is the kitchen in which you had that talk with the man Skinner."

"Yes?" she said hesitatingly.

"Here, next to it, is the scullery, almost as large, you will observe, as is the kitchen. Beyond the kitchen is a cellar."

He waited a moment; then said slowly, impressively, "Now in that cellar, Mrs. Bude, was found, just five days ago, the body of a woman. That woman was Malton's first wife."

The words formed themselves on her lips: "Malton's first wife?" but she did not utter them aloud. She only stared at him, while terror slowly filled her beautiful eyes.

"We have reason to suppose that there will be no difficulty in proving that the last woman James Malton took there before he took you there was his wife, and that he left her there, dead or alive, on the afternoon that you and he met for the first time."

"How horrible!" she murmured; and for a moment he feared she was going to faint.

"The opening day of the inquest has been fixed for next Saturday morning. I have with me a subpœna calling for your attendance. By that time the extradition formalities will have been completed, and we hope Malton will be present."

"Present?" she echoed stupidly.

"Yes, we discovered his whereabouts quite easily. He was with his new wife, a rich Canadian lady, at Deauville. But for Skinner, and but"—he added with unconscious cruelty—"for your going down to Skinner, and giving him that food, and letting him stay there long enough to take his bearings, so to speak, and—you'll pardon my mentioning something so unpleasant—giving him the opportunity of sniffing that curious odour, the body of that poor woman might not have been found, one may almost say, for years. Malton had already sent the absent owner the purchase money for the house."

"Can *nothing* save me, Mr. Eaton? *Must* I appear at the inquest?"

She was looking at him with eyes dilated with terror.

"I'm afraid you must be at the inquest; and further, if Malton is committed for trial, you will, of course, have to give evidence at the trial."

He waited a moment: "Here is the summons to attend the inquest," he murmured.

She took it from his hand, and then she walked over to the fireplace and rang the bell.

After he had gone Eva Bude went to her writing-table and took up the letter she had been writing to her friend.

Violently she tore it across and across—and then, setting fire to the pieces, she watched them burn.

C. Hedley Barker

THE ACE OF TROUBLE

from PEARSON'S MAGAZINE, 1925

Permission to reprint is granted through John Farquharson

IT MUST HAVE been unbearable for Herbert Dawlish to reflect that, had the waitress not been slack, he would never have committed murder.

Dawlish had just ten minutes to spare, and he was feeling infernally hungry. So he dropped into an A.B.C. and called for a cup of tea and a bath bun. The waitress dawdled, and Herbert Dawlish fidgeted impatiently. He must have taken out his watch at least ten times in five minutes. When at last his tea and bath bun arrived, he had two minutes in which to bolt it down and catch the train for Herne Bay.

He rushed out to the platform just as the train was pulling out. His lips tightened with annoyance as he realised that he couldn't possibly reach the saloon. This meant that he would miss the "coasters," and his game of cards.

The train gathered speed. Dawlish gripped his bag, and ran, realising that he would be lucky now to catch it at all. However, he managed with a flying leap to land (amid the yells of railway officials) on the footboard of the rear coach. He clung there for a moment, panting, then opened the door and subsided with a gasp on the seat.

The man opposite regarded Herbert Dawlish with interest. He was a flashy sort of person with a gold horseshoe in his tie, and aggressively square shoes. He said the usual things that people do say on these occasions—narrow shave, not so easy to run at Dawlish's time of life, and so forth. He also launched into a protracted and lurid reminiscence which had to do with one Sam Biggs, who, being denied the luck which had attended Mr. Dawlish, fell between the footboard and the platform.

" 'Orrible sight. I never want to see another like it."

Herbert Dawlish, far as distant Jupiter in that moment from murderous intent, gazed upon the man he was going to mur-

der. He never suffered fools gladly, and this fellow seemed a particularly priceless specimen. However, when the man suggested a game of cards, Dawlish brightened considerably. He had a passion for cards, and he fell in eagerly with the proposal.

"I have a pack here," he said, diving into his pocket. There his fingers came in contact with something hard, and he pulled it out with an embarrassed smile. He said, jocularly, laying an automatic pistol on the table:

"Don't be alarmed. I'm no gunman. I bought this in town to-day. You see, I belong to the Herne Bay rifle club, and they've just started a revolver class. Fascinating sport."

The other nodded.

"May I?" he said, and, picking up the weapon, examined it with the eye of an expert. "Dandy little gun," was his comment. "Loaded, too, by gosh!"

"Er—yes. I brought some cartridges along. It's quite safe. The catch is on. Now, what shall we play? Do you happen to know Soixante-six. It's an ideal game for two."

"Swa——?"

"In other words, sixty-six. It's a kind of——"

"Right, governor! I got you. Sixty-six. Yers. Used to play it over the other side. I remember at Vimmy Ridge——"

"Cut, will you?"

Herbert Dawlish dealt.

"What about stakes?" he murmured with a swift, appraising glance at the other's ensemble.

"Oh, five bob a time."

Dawlish was surprised. This was a good deal higher than he was used to, but he guessed he could hold his own, anyway. He dealt the cards in bundles of three and two. Play began.

Now, it very soon became obvious to Dawlish that this fellow with the horseshoe had handled cards before. He had that nifty method of shuffling and dealing which involves a flourishing and crackling of the cards. He licked his thumbs. The pasteboards flew from his nimble fingers like greased lightning.

Dawlish paid out. Five—ten—fifteen—thirty-five—fifty. He lost six pounds. A dull flush tinted his high cheekbones. He fortified himself with a long pull from his pocket-flask, clenched his teeth, and concentrated grimly.

Long before the train had reached Chatham that six pounds had become forty-six. Dawlish was plunging madly to retrieve his losses. A ghastly fear contracted his heart. He had lost much—very much more than he could afford to lose. It was quarter day, and he had calls to meet which must be met out of this money that he was losing.

At seventy pounds Herbert Dawlish leant back and wiped

the sweat from his forehead with a shaky hand. He was pale, and the corners of his mouth were out of his control. A very unpleasant sight, indeed.

"I am afraid," he muttered, "that I can't go on. I've lost every penny."

The nifty man stopped short in the midst of a tune he was whistling.

"That a fact? Hard luck, mate. Good game, though, eh? 'Ammer and tongs."

"Look here," said Dawlish abjectly. "I—it's a queer thing to ask, but—could you let me have that money back? For a little while, I mean. I would repay you, later. But, just now, I—I——"

The nifty man had been staring at Dawlish in blank surprise. Now he suddenly guffawed.

"Well, that's rich," he observed. "I'll tell the missus that when I gits 'ome. She'll cry 'er eyes out, that she will. No matey. Napoo. I ain't the Salvation Army 'Ome."

"Let me explain," begged Dawlish in agony. "You don't understand. It's like this——"

"Aw, shove a boot in it, ole feller. You oughtn't never to 'ave come out without yer nurse. Hey! What the——"

"Put up your hands," said Dawlish, staring wickedly from behind his automatic. "Right up!"

Even then, Dawlish had no notion of murder. He merely wanted to scare the fellow into parting with the money. He was frantic. He positively daren't go home and face his wife with a story of seventy pounds lost. But, firearms are dangerous things to play with. The nifty man's eyes narrowed. He made a sudden spring. And Dawlish, closing his eyes, pulled the trigger.

Death is shockingly quick and sudden. In one brief second Dawlish was saddled with a corpse. There was a grim blue hole in the middle of its forehead, and it had sagged slackly on the floor like a sack of something. Dawlish commanded himself with an effort, and began to think out ways and means.

He was about to bundle the body out of the carriage on to the permanent way when he caught sight of a wrist-watch. An inspiration caused him to alter the time of this watch to five-fifty. He counted on the watch stopping when the crash came, and a watch stopped at five-fifty (unless the body were found immediately) would point to the fact of the man's having travelled down by an earlier train.

This done, he opened the carriage-door, looked cautiously ahead and behind, then, with the train doing about forty, shoved out the remains of the nifty man.

Venner, the Scotland Yard man, was in the eight-forty to

town on the following morning. He and two others greeted Dawlish with ribald cries, as usual. These four had played cards on the up journey every day (barring holidays) for ten years.

"Come along, you old blighter—the cards," they cried. "Where were you loafing last night, by the way?"

"Late," said Dawlish. "Had to run for it. Seen the paper? This murder on the five-ten?"

Smith, who was sorting out Dawlish's cards, nodded.

"Poor devil's all bashed about," he said. "Face practically gone, they say. Not that he'd feel that, I suppose. You heard anything about it, Venner, apart from what the papers give?"

Venner smiled quietly.

"I hear a good deal," he said, "that I'm not allowed to tell. As a matter of fact, I viewed the body about two or three hours after the murder. They rushed me up by car from Herne Bay."

"I say," said Smith, "look here, old Dawlish, you've only got half a pack here. The ace of trouble's missing."

Smith always called the ace of spades the ace of trouble, because spades stood for trouble in the fortune-teller's jargon.

"I expect it's in my pocket," said Dawlish.

But he was spared the trouble of searching by Venner. The man from the Yard looked suddenly grave as he pulled out a card from his own pocket.

"No," he said. "Here it is, unless I'm mistaken."

He laid the ace of spades on the table—the ace which had been missing from that same pack.

"Yes, that's it, by Jove!" cried Smith. "Where the devil did you get it, you old card-sharper?"

Venner turned and looked at Dawlish. Then he laid a hand on his arm.

"Dawlish," he said, "this hurts like blazes. But I've got to do it. You're arrested. *That ace of spades was found up the sleeve of the murdered man.*"

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

THE ADVENTURE OF THE PRIORY SCHOOL

from THE RETURN OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Doubleday, Doran & Company

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WE HAVE HAD some dramatic entrances and exits upon our small stage at Baker Street, but I cannot recollect anything more sudden and startling than the first appearance of Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable, M.A., Ph.D., etc. His card, which seemed too small to carry the weight of his academic distinctions, preceded him by a few seconds, and then he entered himself—so large, so pompous, and so dignified that he was the very embodiment of self-possession and solidity. And yet his first action when the door had closed behind him was to stagger against the table, whence he slipped down upon the floor, and there was that majestic figure prostrate and insensible upon our bearskin hearthrug.

We had sprung to our feet, and for a few moments we stared in silent amazement at this ponderous piece of wreckage, which told of some sudden and fatal storm far out on the ocean of life. Then Holmes hurried with a cushion for his head, and I with brandy for his lips. The heavy white face was seamed with lines of trouble, the hanging pouches under the closed eyes were leaden in colour, the loose mouth drooped dolorously at the corners, the rolling chins were unshaven. Collar and shirt bore the grime of a long journey, and the hair bristled unkempt from the well-shaped head. It was a sorely stricken man who lay before us.

"What is it, Watson?" asked Holmes.

"Absolute exhaustion—possibly mere hunger and fatigue,"

said I, with my finger on the thready pulse, where the stream of life trickled thin and small.

"Return ticket from Mackleton, in the North of England," said Holmes, drawing it from the watch-pocket.

"It is not twelve o'clock yet. He has certainly been an early starter."

The puckered eyelids had begun to quiver, and now a pair of vacant grey eyes looked up at us. An instant later the man had scrambled on to his feet, his face crimson with shame.

"Forgive this weakness, Mr. Holmes; I have been a little overwrought. Thank you, if I might have a glass of milk and a biscuit I have no doubt that I should be better. I came personally, Mr. Holmes, in order to ensure that you would return with me. I feared that no telegram would convince you of the absolute urgency of the case."

"When you are quite restored——"

"I am quite well again. I cannot imagine how I came to be so weak. I wish you, Mr. Holmes, to come to Mackleton with me by the next train."

My friend shook his head.

"My colleague, Dr. Watson, could tell you that we are very busy at present. I am retained in this case of the Ferrers Documents, and the Abergavenny murder is coming up for trial. Only a very important issue could call me from London at present."

"Important!" Our visitor threw up his hands. "Have you heard nothing of the abduction of the only son of the Duke of Holdernesse?"

"What! the late Cabinet Minister?"

"Exactly. We had tried to keep it out of the papers, but there was some rumour in the *Globe* last night. I thought it might have reached your ears."

Holmes shot out his long thin arm and picked out Volume "H" in his encyclopædia of reference.

" 'Holdernesse, sixth Duke, K.G., P.C.'—half the alphabet! 'Baron Beverley, Earl of Carston'—dear me, what a list! 'Lord-Lieutenant of Hallamshire since 1900. Married Edith, daughter of Sir Charles Appledore, 1888. Heir and only child, Lord Saltire. Owns about two hundred and fifty thousand acres. Minerals in Lancashire and Wales. Address: Carlton House Terrace; Holdernesse Hall, Hallamshire; Carston Castle, Bangor, Wales. Lord of the Admiralty, 1872; Chief Secretary of State for——' Well, well, this man is certainly one of the greatest subjects of the Crown!"

"The greatest and perhaps the wealthiest. I am aware, Mr. Holmes, that you take a very high line in professional matters, and that you are prepared to work for the work's sake. I may tell you, however, that his Grace has already intimated that

a cheque for five thousand pounds will be handed over to the person who can tell him where his son is, and another thousand to him who can name the man, or men, who have taken him."

"It is a princely offer," said Holmes. "Watson, I think that we shall accompany Dr. Huxtable back to the North of England. And now, Dr. Huxtable, when you have consumed that milk you will kindly tell me what has happened, when it happened, how it happened, and, finally, what Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable, of the Priory School, near Mackleton, has to do with the matter, and why he comes three days after an event—the state of your chin gives the date—to ask for my humble services."

Our visitor had consumed his milk and biscuits. The light had come back to his eyes and the colour to his cheeks as he set himself with great vigour and lucidity to explain the situation.

"I must inform you, gentlemen, that the Priory is a preparatory school, of which I am the founder and principal. *Huxtable's Sidelights on Horace* may possibly recall my name to your memories. The Priory is, without exception, the best and most select preparatory school in England. Lord Leverstoke, the Earl of Blackwater, Sir Cathcart Soames—they all have entrusted their sons to me. But I felt that my school had reached its zenith when, three weeks go, the Duke of Holdernesse sent Mr. James Wilder, his secretary, with the intimation that young Lord Saltire, ten years old, his only son and heir, was about to be committed to my charge. Little did I think that this would be the prelude to the most crushing misfortune of my life.

"On May 1st the boy arrived, that being the beginning of the summer term. He was a charming youth, and he soon fell into our ways. I may tell you—I trust that I am not indiscreet; half-confidences are absurd in such a case—that he was not entirely happy at home. It is an open secret that the duke's married life had not been a peaceful one, and the matter had ended in a separation by mutual consent, the duchess taking up her residence in the South of France. This had occurred very shortly before, and the boy's sympathies are known to have been strongly with his mother. He moped after her departure from Holdernesse Hall, and it was for this reason that the duke desired to send him to my establishment. In a fortnight the boy was quite at home with us, and was apparently absolutely happy.

"He was last seen on the night of May 13th—that is, the night of last Monday. His room was on the second floor, and was approached through another larger room in which two boys were sleeping. These boys saw and heard nothing, so

that it is certain that young Saltire did not pass out that way. His window was open, and there is a stout ivy plant leading to the ground. We could trace no footmarks below, but it is sure that this is the only possible exit.

"His absence was discovered at seven o'clock on Tuesday morning. His bed had been slept in. He had dressed himself fully before going off in his usual school suit of black Eton jacket and dark grey trousers. There were no signs that any one had entered the room, and it is quite certain that anything in the nature of cries or a struggle would have been heard, since Caunter, the elder boy in the inner room, is a very light sleeper.

"When Lord Saltire's disappearance was discovered I at once called a roll of the whole establishment—boys, masters, and servants. It was then that we ascertained that Lord Saltire had not been alone in his flight. Heidegger, the German master, was missing. His room was on the second floor, at the farther end of the building, facing the same way as Lord Saltire's. His bed had also been slept in; but he had apparently gone away partly dressed, since his shirt and socks were lying on the floor. He had undoubtedly let himself down by the ivy, for we could see the marks of his feet where he had landed on the lawn. His bicycle was kept in a small shed beside this lawn, and it also was gone.

"He had been with me for two years, and came with the best references; but he was a silent, morose man, not very popular either with masters or boys. No trace could be found of the fugitives, and now on Thursday morning we are as ignorant as we were on Tuesday. Enquiry was, of course, made at once at Holdernesse Hall. It is only a few miles away, and we imagined that in some sudden attack of home-sickness he had gone back to his father; but nothing had been heard of him. The duke is greatly agitated—and as to me, you have seen yourselves the state of nervous prostration to which the suspense and the responsibility have reduced me. Mr. Holmes, if ever you put forward your full powers, I implore you to do so now, for never in your life could you have a case which is more worthy of them."

Sherlock Holmes had listened with the utmost intentness to the statement of the unhappy schoolmaster. His drawn brows and the deep furrow between them showed that he needed no exhortation to concentrate all his attention upon a problem which, apart from the tremendous interests involved, must appeal so directly to his love of the complex and the unusual. He now drew out his notebook and jotted down one or two memoranda.

"You have been very remiss in not coming to me sooner,"

said he severely. "You start me on my investigation with a very serious handicap. It is inconceivable, for example, that this ivy and this lawn would have yielded nothing to an expert observer."

"I am not to blame, Mr. Holmes. His Grace was extremely desirous to avoid all public scandal. He was afraid of his family unhappiness being dragged before the world. He has a deep horror of anything of the kind."

"But there has been some official investigation?"

"Yes, sir, and it has proved most disappointing. An apparent clue was at once obtained, since a boy and a young man were reported to have been seen leaving a neighbouring station by an early train. Only last night we had news that the couple had been hunted down in Liverpool, and they prove to have no connection whatever with the matter in hand. Then it was that in my despair and disappointment, after a sleepless night, I came straight to you by the early train."

"I suppose the local investigation was relaxed while this false clue was being followed up?"

"It was entirely dropped."

"So that three days have been wasted. The affair has been most deplorably handled."

"I feel it, and admit it."

"And yet the problem should be capable of ultimate solution. I shall be very happy to look into it. Have you been able to trace any connection between the missing boy and this German master?"

"None at all."

"Was he in the master's class?"

"No; he never exchanged a word with him, so far as I know."

"That is certainly very singular. Had the boy a bicycle?"

"No."

"Was any other bicycle missing?"

"No."

"Is that certain?"

"Quite."

"Well, now, you do not mean to seriously suggest that this German rode off upon a bicycle in the dead of night bearing the boy in his arms?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what is the story in your mind?"

"The bicycle may have been a blind. It may have been hidden somewhere, and the pair gone off on foot."

"Quite so; but it seems rather an absurd blind, does it not? Were there other bicycles in this shed?"

"Several."

"Would he not have hidden a *couple* had he desired to give the idea that they had gone off upon them?"

"I suppose he would."

"Of course he would. The blind theory won't do. But the incident is an admirable starting-point for an investigation. After all, a bicycle is not an easy thing to conceal or to destroy. One other question. Did any one call to see the boy on the day before he disappeared?"

"No."

"Did he get any letters?"

"Yes; one letter."

"From whom?"

"From his father."

"Do you open the boys' letters?"

"No."

"How do you know it was from the father?"

"The coat of arms was on the envelope, and it was addressed in the duke's peculiar stiff hand. Besides, the duke remembers having written."

"When had he a letter before that?"

"Not for several days."

"Had he ever one from France?"

"No; never."

"You see the point of my questions, of course. Either the boy was carried off by force or he went of his own free will. In the latter case you would expect that some prompting from outside would be needed to make so young a lad do such a thing. If he has had no visitors, that prompting must have come in letters. Hence I try to find out who were his correspondents."

"I fear I cannot help you much. His only correspondent, so far as I know, was his own father."

"Who wrote to him on the very day of his disappearance. Were the relations between father and son very friendly?"

"His Grace is never very friendly with any one. He is completely immersed in large public questions, and is rather inaccessible to all ordinary emotions. But he was always kind to the boy in his own way."

"But the sympathies of the latter were with the mother?"

"Yes."

"Did he say so?"

"No."

"The duke, then?"

"Good heavens, no!"

"Then how could you know?"

"I have had some confidential talk with Mr. James Wilder, his Grace's secretary. It was he who gave me the information about Lord Saltire's feelings."

"I see. By the way, that last letter of the duke's—was it found in the boy's room after he was gone?"

"No; he had taken it with him. I think, Mr. Holmes, it is time that we were leaving for Euston."

"I will order a four-wheeler. In a quarter of an hour we shall be at your service. If you are telegraphing home, Mr. Huxtable, it would be well to allow the people in your neighborhood to imagine that the enquiry is still going on in Liverpool, or wherever else that red herring led your pack. In the meantime I will do a little quiet work at your own doors, and perhaps the scent is not so cold but that two old hounds like Watson and myself may get a sniff of it."

That evening found us in the cold, bracing atmosphere of the Peak country, in which Dr. Huxtable's famous school is situated. It was already dark when we reached it. A card was lying on the hall table, and the butler whispered something to his master, who turned to us with agitation in every heavy feature.

"The duke is here," said he. "The duke and Mr. Wilder are in the study. Come, gentlemen, and I will introduce you."

I was, of course, familiar with the pictures of the famous statesman, but the man himself was very different from his representation. He was a tall and stately person, scrupulously dressed, with a drawn, thin face, and a nose which was grotesquely curved and long. His complexion was of a dead pallor, which was more startling by contrast with a long, dwindling beard of vivid red, which flowed down over his white waistcoat, with his watch-chain gleaming through its fringe. Such was the stately presence who looked stonily at us from the centre of Dr. Huxtable's hearthrug. Beside him stood a very young man, whom I understood to be Wilder, the private secretary. He was small, nervous, alert, with intelligent, light blue eyes and mobile features. It was he who at once, in an incisive and positive tone, opened the conversation.

"I called this morning, Dr. Huxtable, too late to prevent you from starting for London. I learned that your object was to invite Mr. Sherlock Holmes to undertake the conduct of this case. His Grace is surprised, Dr. Huxtable, that you should have taken such a step without consulting him."

"When I learned the police had failed——"

"His Grace is by no means convinced that the police have failed."

"But surely, Mr. Wilder——"

"You are well aware, Dr. Huxtable, that his Grace is particularly anxious to avoid all public scandal. He prefers to take as few people as possible into his confidence."

"The matter can be easily remedied," said the browbeaten doctor. "Mr. Sherlock Holmes can return to London by the morning train."

"Hardly that, doctor, hardly that," said Holmes, in his blandest voice. "This northern air is invigorating and pleasant, so I propose to spend a few days upon your moors, and to occupy my mind as best I may. Whether I have the shelter of your roof or of the village inn is, of course, for you to decide."

I could see that the unfortunate doctor was in the last stage of indecision, from which he was rescued by the deep, sonorous voice of the red-bearded duke, which boomed out like a dinner-gong.

"I agree with Mr. Wilder, Dr. Huxtable, that you would have done wisely to consult me. But since Mr. Holmes has already been taken into your confidence, it would indeed be absurd that we should not avail ourselves of his services. Far from going to the inn, Mr. Holmes, I should be pleased if you would come and stay with me at Holdernesse Hall!"

"I thank your Grace. For the purposes of my investigation I think that it would be wiser for me to remain at the scene of the mystery."

"Just as you like, Mr. Holmes. Any information which Mr. Wilder or I can give you is, of course, at your disposal."

"It will probably be necessary for me to see you at the Hall," said Holmes. "I would only ask you now, sir, whether you have formed any explanation in your own mind as to the mysterious disappearance of your son?"

"No, sir, I have not."

"Excuse me if I allude to that which is painful to you, but I have no alternative. Do you think that the duchess had anything to do with the matter?"

The great minister showed perceptible hesitation.

"I do not think so," he said at last.

"The other most obvious explanation is that the child has been kidnapped for the purpose of levying ransom. You have not had any demand of the sort?"

"No, sir."

"One more question, your Grace. I understand that you wrote to your son upon the day when this incident occurred."

"No; I wrote upon the day before."

"Exactly. But he received it on that day?"

"Yes."

"Was there anything in your letter which might have unbalanced him or induced him to take such a step?"

"No, sir, certainly not."

"Did you post that letter yourself?"

The nobleman's reply was interrupted by his secretary, who broke in with some heat.

"His Grace is not in the habit of posting letters himself," said he. "This letter was laid with others upon the study table, and I myself put them in the postbag."

"You are sure this one was among them?"

"Yes; I observed it."

"How many letters did your Grace write that day?"

"Twenty or thirty. I have a large correspondence. But surely this is somewhat irrelevant?"

"Not entirely," said Holmes.

"For my own part," the duke continued, "I have advised the police to turn their attention to the South of France. I have already said that I do not believe that the duchess would encourage so monstrous an action, but the lad had the most wrong-headed opinions, and it is possible that he may have fled to her, aided and abetted by this German. I think, Dr. Huxtable, that we will now return to the Hall."

I could see that there were other questions which Holmes would have wished to put; but the nobleman's abrupt manner showed that the interview was at an end. It was evident that to his intensely aristocratic nature this discussion of his intimate family affairs with a stranger was most abhorrent, and that he feared lest every fresh question would throw a fiercer light into the discreetly shadowed corners of his ducal history.

When the nobleman and his secretary had left, my friend flung himself at once with characteristic eagerness into the investigation.

The boy's chamber was carefully examined, and yielded nothing save the absolute conviction that it was only through the window that he could have escaped. The German master's room and effects gave no further clue. In his case a trailer of ivy had given way under his weight, and we saw by the light of a lantern the mark on the lawn where his heels had come down. That one dent in the short green grass was the only material witness left of this inexplicable nocturnal flight.

Sherlock Holmes left the house alone, and only returned after eleven. He had obtained a large ordnance map of the neighbourhood, and this he brought into my room, where he laid it out on the bed, and, having balanced the lamp in the middle of it, he began to smoke over it, and occasionally to point out objects of interest with the reeking amber of his pipe.

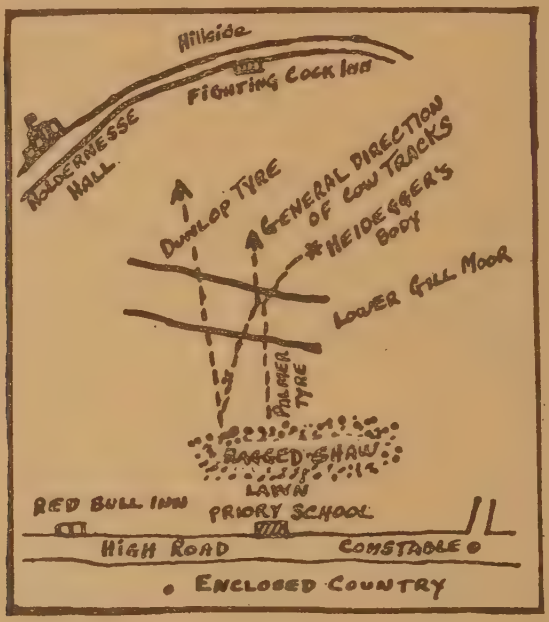
"This case grows upon me, Watson," said he. "There are decidedly some points of interest in connection with it. In this early stage I want you to realise these geographical features, which may have a good deal to do with our investigation.

"Look at this map. This dark square is the Priory School.

I'll put a pin in it. Now, this line is the main road. You see that it runs east and west past the school, and you see also there is no side road for a mile either way. If these two folk passed away by road it was *this* road."

"Exactly."

"By a singular and happy chance we are able to some extent to check what passed along this road during the night in question. At this point, where my pipe is now resting, a country constable was on duty from twelve to six. It is, as you perceive, the first cross road on the east side. This man



SKETCH MAP SHOWING THE LOCALITY

declares that he was not absent from his post for an instant, and he is positive that neither boy nor man could have gone that way unseen. I have spoken with this policeman tonight, and he appears to me to be a perfectly reliable person. That blocks this end. We have now to deal with the other. There is an inn here, the 'Red Bull,' the landlady of which was ill. She had sent to Mackleton for a doctor, but he did not arrive until morning, being absent at another case. The people at the inn were alert all night, awaiting his coming, and one or other

of them seems to have continually had an eye upon the road. They declare that no one passed. If their evidence is good, then we are fortunate enough to be able to block the west, and also to be able to say that the fugitives did *not* use the road at all."

"But the bicycle?" I objected.

"Quite so. We will come to the bicycle presently. To continue our reasoning: if these people did not go by the road, they must have traversed the country to the north of the house or to the south of the house. That is certain. Let us weigh the one against the other. On the south of the house is, as you perceive, a large district of arable land, cut up into small fields, with stone walls between them. There, I admit that a bicycle is impossible. We can dismiss the idea. We turn to the country on the north. Here there lies a grove of trees, marked as the 'Ragged Shaw,' and on the farther side stretches a great rolling moor—Lower Gill Moor—extending for ten miles, and sloping gradually upwards. Here, at one side of this wilderness, is Holdernesse Hall, ten miles by road, but only six across the moor. It is a peculiarly desolate plain. A few moor farmers have small holdings, where they rear sheep and cattle. Except these, the plover and the curlew are the only inhabitants until you come to the Chesterfield high road. There is a church there, you see, a few cottages, and an inn. Beyond that the hills become precipitous. Surely it is here to the north that our quest must lie."

"But the bicycle?" I persisted.

"Well, well!" said Holmes impatiently. "A good cyclist does not need a high road. The moor is intersected with paths, and the moon was at the full. Halloa! What is this?"

There was an agitated knock at the door, and an instant afterwards Dr. Huxtable was in the room. In his hand he held a blue cricket-cap, with a white chevron on the peak.

"At last we have a clue!" he cried. "Thank Heaven, at last we are on the dear boy's track! It is his cap."

"Where was it found?"

"In the van of the gipsies who camped on the moor. They left on Tuesday. To-day the police traced them down and examined their caravan. This was found."

"How do they account for it?"

"They shuffled and lied—said that they found it on the moor on Tuesday morning. They know where he is, the rascals! Thank goodness, they are all safe under lock and key. Either the fear of the law or the duke's purse will certainly get out of them all that they know."

"So far, so good," said Holmes, when the doctor had at last left the room. "It at least bears out the theory that it is on the side of the Lower Gill Moor that we must hope for results.

The police have really done nothing locally, save the arrest of these gipsies. Look here, Watson! There is a watercourse across the moor. You see it marked here in the map. In some parts it widens into a morass. This is particularly so in the region between Holdernesse Hall and the school. It is vain to look elsewhere for tracks in this dry weather; but at that point there is certainly a chance of some record being left. I will call you early to-morrow morning, and you and I will try if we can throw some light upon the mystery."

The day was just breaking when I woke to find the long, thin form of Holmes by my bedside. He was fully dressed, and had apparently already been out.

"I have done the lawn and the bicycle shed," said he. "I have also had a ramble through the Ragged Shaw. Now, Watson, there is cocoa ready in the next room. I must beg you to hurry, for we have a great day before us."

His eyes shown, and his cheek was flushed with the exhilaration of the master workman who sees his work lies ready before him. A very different Holmes, this active, alert man, from the introspective and pallid dreamer of Baker Street. I felt, as I looked upon that supple figure, alive with nervous energy, that it was indeed a strenuous day that awaited us.

And yet it opened in the blackest disappointment. With high hopes we struck across the peaty, russet moor, intersected with a thousand sheep-paths, until we came to the broad, light green belt which marked the morass between us and Holdernesse. Certainly, if the lad had gone homewards, he must have passed this, and he would not pass it without leaving his trace. But no sign of him or the German could be seen. With a darkening face my friend strode along the margin, eagerly observant of every muddy stain upon the mossy surface. Sheepmarks there were in profusion, and at one place some miles down, cows had left their tracks. Nothing more.

"Check number one," said Holmes, looking gloomily over the rolling expanse of the moor. "There is another morass down yonder, and a narrow neck between. Halloa! halloa! halloa! What have we here?"

We had come on a small black ribbon of pathway. In the middle of it, clearly marked on the sodden soil, was the track of a bicycle.

"Hurrah!" I cried. "We have it."

But Holmes was shaking his head, and his face was puzzled and expectant rather than joyous.

"A bicycle certainly, but not *the* bicycle," said he. "I am familiar with forty-two different impressions left by tyres. This, as you perceive, is a Dunlop, with a patch upon the outer cover. Heidegger's tyres were Palmers, leaving longitudi-

nal stripes. Aveling, the mathematical master, was sure upon the point. Therefore it is not Heidegger's track."

"The boy's, then?"

"Possibly, if we could prove a bicycle to have been in his possession. But this we have utterly failed to do. This track, as you perceive, was made by a rider who was going from the direction of the school."

"Or towards it?"

"No, no, my dear Watson. The more deeply sunk impression is, of course, the hind wheel, upon which the weigh rests. You perceive several places where it has passed across and obliterated the more shallow mark of the front one. It was undoubtedly heading away from the school. It may or may not be connected with our enquiry, but we will follow it backwards before we go any farther."

We did so, and at the end of a few hundred yards lost the tracks as we emerged from the boggy portion of the moor. Following the path backwards, we picked out another spot, where a spring trickled across it. Here, once again, was the mark of the bicycle, though nearly obliterated by the hoofs of cows. After that there was no sign, but the path ran right on into Ragged Shaw, the wood which backed on to the school. From this wood the cycle must have emerged. Holmes sat down on the boulder and rested his chin in his hands. I had smoked two cigarettes before he moved.

"Well, well," said he at last. "It is, of course, possible that a cunning man might change the tyre of his bicycle in order to leave unfamiliar tracks. A criminal who was capable of such a thought is a man whom I should be proud to do business with. We will leave this question undecided and hark back to our morass again, for we have left a good deal unexplored."

We continued our systematic survey of the edge of the sodden portion of the moor, and soon our perseverance was gloriously rewarded.

Right across the lower part of the bog lay a miry path. Holmes gave a cry of delight as he approached it. An impression like a fine bundle of telegraph wires ran down the centre of it. It was the Palmer tyre.

"Here is Herr Heidegger, sure enough!" cried Holmes exultantly. "My reasoning seems to have been pretty sound, Watson."

"I congratulate you."

"But we have a long way still to go. Kindly walk clear of the path. Now let us follow the trail. I fear that it will not lead very far."

We found, however, as we advanced, that this portion of the moor is intersected with soft patches, and, though we

frequently lost sight of the track, we always succeeded in picking it up once more.

"Do you observe," said Holmes, "that the rider is now undoubtedly forcing the pace? There can be no doubt of it. Look at this impression, where you get both tyres clear. The one is as deep as the other. That can only mean that the rider is throwing his weight on to the handle-bar as a man does when he is sprinting. By Jove! he has had a fall."

There was a broad, irregular smudge covering some yards of the track. Then there were a few foot-marks, and the tyre reappeared once more.

"A side-slip," I suggested.

Holmes held up a crumpled branch of flowering gorse. To my horror I perceived that the yellow blossoms were all dabbled with crimson. On the path, too, and among the heather were dark stains of clotted blood.

"Bad!" said Holmes. "Bad! Stand clear! Watson. Not an unnecessary footstep! What do I read here? He fell wounded, he stood up, he remounted, he proceeded. But there is no other track. Cattle on this side path. He was surely not gored by a bull? Impossible! But I see no traces of any one else. We must push on, Watson. Surely, with stains as well as the track to guide us, he cannot escape us now."

Our search was not a very long one. The tracks of the tyre began to curve fantastically upon the wet and shining path. Suddenly, as I looked ahead, the gleam of metal caught my eye from amid the thick gorse bushes. Out of them we dragged a bicycle, Palmer-tyred, one pedal bent, and the whole front of it horribly smeared and slobbered with blood. On the other side of the bushes a shoe was projecting. We ran round, and there lay the unfortunate rider. He was a tall man, full bearded, with spectacles, one glass of which had been knocked out. The cause of his death was a frightful blow upon the head, which had crushed in part of his skull. That he could have gone on after receiving such an injury said much for the vitality and courage of the man. He wore shoes, but no socks, and his open coat disclosed a night-shirt beneath it. It was undoubtedly the German master.

Holmes turned the body over reverently, and examined it with great attention. He then sat in deep thought for a time, and I could see by his ruffled brow that this grim discovery had not, in his opinion, advanced us much in our enquiry.

"It is a little difficult to know what to do, Watson," said he, at last. "My own inclinations are to push this enquiry on, for we have already lost so much time that we cannot afford to waste another hour. On the other hand, we are bound to inform the police of this discovery, and to see that this poor fellow's body is looked after."

"I could take a note back."

"But I need your company and assistance. Wait a bit! There is a fellow cutting peat up yonder. Bring him over here, and he will guide the police."

I brought the peasant across, and Holmes dispatched the frightened man with a note to Dr. Huxtable.

"Now, Watson," said he, "we have picked up two clues this morning. One is the bicycle with the Palmer tyre, and we see what that has led to. The other is the bicycle with the patched Dunlop. Before we start to investigate that, let us try to realise what we *do* know, so as to make the most of it, and to separate the essential from the accidental.

"First of all, I wish to impress upon you that the boy certainly left of his own free will. He got down from his window and he went off, either alone or with some one. That is sure."

I assented.

"Well, now, let us turn to this unfortunate German master. The boy was fully dressed when he fled. Therefore he foresaw what he would do. But the German went without his socks. He certainly acted on very short notice."

"Undoubtedly."

"Why did he go? Because, from his bedroom window, he saw the flight of the boy. Because he wished to overtake him and bring him back. He seized his bicycle, pursued the lad, and in pursuing him met his death."

"So it would seem."

"Now I come to the critical part of my argument. The natural action of a man in pursuing a little boy would be to run after him. He would know that he could overtake him. But the German does not do so. He turns to his bicycle. I am told that he was an excellent cyclist. He would not do this if he did not see that the boy had some swift means of escape."

"The other bicycle."

"Let us continue our reconstruction. He meets his death five miles from the school—not by a bullet, mark you, which even a lad might conceivably discharge, but by a savage blow dealt by a vigorous arm. The lad, then, *had* a companion in his flight. And the flight was a swift one, since it took five miles before an expert cyclist could overtake them. Yet we survey the ground round the scene of the tragedy. What do we find? A few cattle tracks, nothing more. I took a wide sweep round, and there is no path within fifty yards. Another cyclist could have had nothing to do with the actual murder. Nor were there any human footmarks."

"Holmes," I cried, "this is impossible."

"Admirable!" he said. "A most illuminating remark. It *is* impossible as I state it, and therefore I must in some respect

have stated it wrong. Yet you saw for yourself. Can you suggest any fallacy?"

"He could not have fractured his skull in a fall?"

"In a morass, Watson?"

"I am at my wits' end."

"Tut, tut; we have solved some worse problems. At least we have plenty of material, if we can only use it. Come, then, and having exhausted the Palmer, let us see what the Dunlop with the patched cover has to offer us."

We picked up the track and followed it onwards for some distance; but soon the moor rose into a long, heather-tufted curve, and we left the watercourse behind us. No further help from tracks could be hoped for. At the spot where we saw the last of the Dunlop tyre it might equally have led to Holdernesse Hall, the stately towers of which rose some miles to our left, or to a low, grey village which lay in front of us, and marked the position of the Chesterfield high road.

As we approched the forbidding and squalid inn, with the sign of a gamecock above the door, Holmes gave a sudden groan and clutched me by the shoulder to save himself from falling. He had had one of those violent strains of the ankle which leave a man helpless. With difficulty he limped up to the door, where a squat, dark, elderly man was smoking a black clay pipe.

"How are you, Mr. Reuben Hayes?" said Holmes.

"Who are you, and how do you get my name so pat?" the countryman answered, with a suspicious flash of a pair of cunning eyes.

"Well, it's printed on the board above your head. It's so easy to see a man who is master of his own house. I suppose you haven't such a thing as a carriage in your stables?"

"No; I have not."

"I can hardly put my foot to the ground."

"Don't put it to the ground."

"But I can't walk."

"Well, then, hop."

Mr. Reuben Hayes's manner was far from gracious, but Holmes took it with admirable good humour.

"Look here, my man," said he. "This is really rather an awkward fix for me. I don't mind how I get on."

"Neither do I," said the morose landlord.

"The matter is very important. I would offer you a sovereign for the use of a bicycle."

The landlord pricked up his ears.

"Where do you want to go?"

"To Holdernesse Hall."

"Pals of the dook, I suppose?" said the landlord, surveying our mud-stained garments with ironical eyes.

Holmes laughed good-naturedly.

"He'll be glad to see us, anyhow."

"Why?"

"Because we bring him news of his lost son."

The landlord gave a very visible start.

"What, you're on his track?"

"He has been heard of in Liverpool. They expect to get him every hour."

Again a swift change passed over the heavy, unshaven face. His manner was suddenly genial.

"I've less reason to wish the dook well than most men," said he, "for I was his head coachman once, and cruel bad he treated me. It was him that sacked me without a character on the word of a lying corn-chandler. But I'm glad to hear that the young lord was heard of in Liverpool, and I'll help you to take the news to the Hall."

"Thank you," said Holmes. "We'll have some food first. Then you can bring round the bicycle."

"I haven't got a bicycle."

Holmes held up a sovereign.

"I tell you man, that I haven't got one. I'll let you have two horses as far as the Hall."

"Well, well," said Holmes, "we'll talk about it when we've had something to eat."

When we were left alone in the stone-flagged kitchen it was astonishing how rapidly that sprained ankle recovered. It was nearly nightfall, and we had eaten nothing since early morning, so that we spent some time over our meal. Holmes was lost in thought, and once or twice he walked over to the window and stared earnestly out. It opened on to a squalid courtyard. In the far corner was a smithy, where a grimy lad was at work. On the other side were the stables. Holmes had sat down again after one of these excursions, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with a loud exclamation.

"By Heaven, Watson, I believe that I've got it!" he cried. "Yes, yes, it must be so. Watson, do you remember seeing any cow-tracks to-day?"

"Yes, several."

"Where?"

"Well, everywhere. They were at the morass, and again on the path, and again near where poor Heidegger met his death."

"Exactly. Well, now, Watson, how many cows did you see on the moor?"

"I don't remember seeing any."

"Strange, Watson, that we should see tracks all along our line, but never a cow on the whole moor; very strange, Watson, eh?"

"Yes, it is strange."

"Now, Watson, make an effort; throw your mind back! Can you see those tracks upon the path?"

"Yes, I can."

"Can you recall that the tracks were sometimes like that, Watson"—he arranged a number of breadcrumbs in this fashion—: : : : :—"and sometimes like this"—: · : · : :— "and occasionally like this"—. · . · . ·

"Can you remember that?"

"No, I cannot."

"But I can. I could swear to it. However, we will go back at our leisure and verify it. What a blind beetle I have been not to draw my conclusion!"

"And what is your conclusion?"

"Only that it is a remarkable cow which walks, canters and gallops. By George, Watson, it was no brain of a country publican that thought out such a blind as that! The coast seems to be clear, save for that lad in the smithy. Let us slip out and see what we can see."

There were two rough-haired, unkempt horses in the tumble-down stable. Holmes raised the hind leg of one of them and laughed aloud.

"Old shoes, but newly shod—old shoes, but new nails. This case deserves to be a classic. Let us go across to the smithy."

The lad continued his work without regarding us. I saw Holmes's eye darting to right and left among the litter of iron and wood which was scattered about the floor. Suddenly, however, we heard a step behind us, and there was the landlord, his heavy eyebrows drawn down over his savage eyes, his swarthy features convulsed with passion.

He held a short metal-headed stick in his hand, and he advanced in so menacing a fashion that I was right glad to feel the revolver in my pocket.

"You infernal spies!" the man cried. "What are you doing there?"

"Why, Mr. Reuben Hayes," said Holmes coolly, "one might think that you were afraid of our finding something out."

The man mastered himself with a violent effort, and his grim mouth loosened into a false laugh, which was more menacing than his frown.

"You're welcome to all you can find out in my smithy," said he. "But look here, mister, I don't care for folk poking about my place without leave, so the sooner you pay your score and get out of this the better I shall be pleased."

"All right, Mr. Hayes—no harm meant," said Holmes. "We have been having a look at your horses; but I think I'll walk after all. It's not far, I believe."

"Not more than two miles to the Hall gates. That's the road

to the left." He watched us with sullen eyes until we had left his premises.

We did not go very far along the road, for Holmes stopped the instant that the curve hid us from the landlord's view.

"We were warm, as the children say, at that inn," said he. "I seem to grow colder every step that I take away from it. No, no; I can't possibly leave it."

"I am convinced," said I, "that this Reuben Hayes knows all about it. A more self-evident villain I never saw."

"Oh! he impressed you in that way, did he? There are the horses, there is the smithy. Yes, it is an interesting place, this 'Fighting Cock.' I think we shall have another look at it in an unobtrusive way."

A long, sloping hillside, dotted with grey limestone boulders stretched behind us. We had turned off the road, and were making our way up the hill, when, looking in the direction of Holdernesse Hall, I saw a cyclist coming swiftly along.

"Get down, Watson!" cried Holmes, with a heavy hand upon my shoulder. We had hardly sunk from view when the man flew past us on the road. Amid a rolling cloud of dust I caught a glimpse of a pale, agitated face—a face with horror in every lineament, the mouth open, the eyes staring wildly in front. It was like some strange caricature of the dapper James Wilder whom we had seen the night before.

"The duke's secretary!" cried Holmes. "Come, Watson, let us see what he does."

We scrambled from rock to rock until in a few moments we had made our way to a point from which we could see the front door of the inn. Wilder's bicycle was leaning against the wall beside it. No one was moving about the house, nor could we catch a glimpse of any faces at the windows. Slowly the twilight crept down as the sun sank behind the high towers of Holdernesse Hall. Then in the gloom we saw the two side-lamps of a trap light up in the stableyard of the inn, and shortly afterwards heard the rattle of hoofs, as it wheeled out into the road and tore off at a furious pace in the direction of Chesterfield.

"What do you make of that, Watson?" Holmes whispered.

"It looks like a flight."

"A single man in a dog-cart, so far as I could see. Well, it certainly was not Mr. James Wilder, for there he is at the door."

A red square of light had sprung out of the darkness. In the middle of it was the black figure of the secretary, his head advanced, peering out into the night. It was evident that he was expecting some one. Then at last there were steps in the road, a second figure was visible for an instant against the light, the door shut, and all was black once more. Five

minutes later a lamp was lit in a room upon the first floor.

"It seems to be a curious class of custom that is done by the 'Fighting Cock,'" said Holmes.

"The bar is on the other side."

"Quite so. These are what one may call the private guests. Now, what in the world is Mr. James Wilder doing in that den at this hour of night, and who is the companion who comes to meet him there? Come, Watson, we must really take a risk and try to investigate this a little more closely."

Together we stole down to the road and crept across to the door of the inn. The bicycle still leaned against the wall. Holmes struck a match and held it to the back wheel, and I heard him chuckle as the light fell upon a patched Dunlop tyre. Up above us was the lighted window.

"I must have a peep through that, Watson. If you bend your back and support yourself upon the wall, I think that I can manage."

An instant later his feet were on my shoulders. But he was hardly up before he was down again.

"Come, my friend," said he, "our day's work has been quite long enough. I think that we have gathered all that we can. It's a long walk to the school, and the sooner we get started the better."

He hardly opened his lips during that weary trudge across the moor, nor would he enter the school when he reached it, but went on to Mackleton Station, whence he could send some telegrams. Late at night I heard him consoling Dr. Huxtable, prostrated by the tragedy of his master's death, and later still he entered my room as alert and vigorous as he had been when he started in the morning.

"All goes well, my friend," said he. "I promise that before tomorrow evening we shall have reached the solution of the mystery."

At eleven o'clock next morning my friend and I were walking up the famous yew avenue of Holdernesse Hall. We were ushered through the magnificent Elizabethan doorway and into his Grace's study. There we found Mr. James Wilder, demure and courtly, but with some trace of that wild terror of the night before still lurking in his furtive eyes and in his twitching features.

"You have come to see his Grace? I am sorry; but the fact is that the duke is far from well. He has been very much upset by the tragic news. We received a telegram from Dr. Huxtable yesterday afternoon, which told us of your discovery."

"I must see the duke, Mr. Wilder."

"But he is in his room."

"Then I must go to his room."

"I believe he is in his bed."

"I will see him there."

Holmes cold and inexorable manner showed the secretary that it was useless to argue with him.

"Very good, Mr. Holmes; I will tell him that you are here."

After half an hour's delay the great nobleman appeared. His face was more cadaverous than ever, his shoulders had rounded, and he seemed to me to be an altogether older man than he had been the morning before. He greeted us with a stately courtesy, and seated himself at his desk, his red beard streaming down on to the table.

"Well, Mr. Holmes?" said he.

But my friend's eyes were fixed upon the secretary, who stood by his master's chair.

"I think, your Grace, that I could speak more freely in Mr. Wilder's absence."

The man turned a shade paler and cast a malignant glance at Holmes.

"If your Grace wishes—"

"Yes, yes; you had better go. Now, Mr. Holmes, what have you to say?"

My friend waited until the door had closed behind the retreating secretary.

"The fact is, your Grace," said he, "that my colleague, Dr. Watson, and myself had an assurance from Dr. Huxtable that a reward had been offered in this case. I should like to have this confirmed from your own lips."

"Certainly, Mr. Holmes."

"It amounted, if I am correctly informed, to five thousand pounds to any one who will tell you where your son is?"

"Exactly."

"And another thousand to the man who will name the person or persons who keep him in custody?"

"Exactly."

"Under the latter heading is included, no doubt, not only those who may have taken him away, but also those who conspire to keep him in his present position?"

"Yes, yes," cried the duke impatiently. "If you do your work well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you will have no reason to complain of niggardly treatment."

My friend rubbed his thin hands together with an appearance of avidity which was a surprise to me, who knew his frugal tastes.

"I fancy that I see your Grace's cheque-book upon the table," said he. "I should be glad if you would make me out a cheque for six thousand pounds. It would be as well, perhaps, for you to cross it. The Capital and Counties Bank, Oxford Street branch, are my agents."

His Grace sat very stern and upright in his chair, and looked stonily at my friend.

"Is this a joke, Mr. Holmes? It is hardly a subject for pleasantry."

"Not at all, your Grace. I was never more earnest in my life."

"What do you mean, then?"

"I mean that I have earned the reward. I know where your son is, and I know some, at least, of those who are holding him."

The duke's beard had turned more aggressively red than ever against his ghastly white face.

"Where is he?" he gasped.

"He is, or was last night, at the Fighting Cock Inn, about two miles from your park gate."

The duke fell back in his chair.

"And whom do you accuse?"

Sherlock Holmes's answer was an astounding one. He stepped swiftly forward and touched the duke upon the shoulder.

"I accuse *you*," said he. "And now, your Grace, I'll trouble you for that cheque."

Never shall I forget the duke's appearance as he sprang up and clawed with his hand like one who is sinking into an abyss. Then, with an extraordinary effort of aristocratic self-command, he sat down and sank his face in his hands. It was some minutes before he spoke.

"How much do you know?" he asked at last, without raising his head.

"I saw you together last night."

"Does any one else besides your friend know?"

"I have spoken to no one."

The duke took a pen in his quivering fingers and opened his cheque-book.

"I shall be as good as my word, Mr. Holmes. I am about to write your cheque, however unwelcome the information which you have gained may be to me. When the offer was first made I little thought the turn which events would take. But you and your friend are men of discretion, Mr. Holmes?"

"I hardly understand your Grace."

"I must put it plainly, Mr. Holmes. If only you two know of the incident, there is no reason why it should go any farther. I think twelve thousand pounds is the sum that I owe you, is it not?"

But Holmes smiled, and shook his head.

"I fear, your Grace, that matters can hardly be arranged so easily. There is the death of this schoolmaster to be accounted for."

"But James knew nothing of that. You cannot hold him responsible for that. It was the work of this brutal ruffian whom he had the misfortune to employ."

"I must take the view, your Grace, that when a man embarks upon a crime he is morally guilty of any other crime which may spring from it."

"Morally, Mr. Holmes. No doubt you are right. But surely not in the eyes of the law. A man cannot be condemned for a murder at which he was not present, and which he loathes and abhors as much as you do. The instant that he heard of it he made a complete confession to me, so filled was he with horror and remorse. He lost not an hour in breaking entirely with the murderer. Oh, Mr. Holmes, you must save him—you must save him! I tell you that you must save him!" The duke had dropped the last attempt at self-command, and was pacing the room with a convulsed face and with his clenched hands waving in the air. At last he mastered himself and sat down once more at his desk. "I appreciate your conduct in coming here before you spoke to any one else," said he. "At least we may take counsel how far we can minimise this hideous scandal."

"Exactly," said Holmes. "I think, your Grace, that this can only be done by absolute and complete frankness between us. I am disposed to help your Grace to the best of my ability; but in order to do so I must understand to the last detail how the matter stands. I realise that your words applied to Mr. James Wilder, and that he is not the murderer."

"No; the murderer has escaped."

Sherlock Holmes smiled demurely.

"Your Grace can hardly have heard of any small reputation which I possess, or you would not imagine that it is so easy to escape me. Mr. Reuben Hayes was arrested at Chesterfield on my information at eleven o'clock last night. I had a telegram from the head of the local police before I left the school this morning."

The duke leaned back in his chair and stared with amazement at my friend.

"You seem to have powers that are hardly human," said he. "So Reuben Hayes is taken? I am right glad to hear it, if it will not react upon the fate of James."

"Your secretary?"

"No, sir; my son."

It was Holmes's turn to look astonished.

"I confess that this is entirely new to me, your Grace, I must beg of you to be more explicit."

"I will conceal nothing from you. I agree with you that complete frankness, however painful it may be to me, is the best policy in this desperate situation to which James's folly

and jealousy have reduced us. When I was a young man, Mr. Holmes, I loved with such a love as comes only once in a lifetime. I offered the lady marriage, but she refused it on the grounds that such a match might mar my career. Had she lived I would certainly never have married any one else. She died, and left this one child, whom for her sake I have cherished and cared for. I could not acknowledge the paternity to the world; but I gave him the best of educations, and since he came to manhood I have kept him near my person. He surprised my secret, and has presumed ever since upon the claim which he has upon me and upon his power of provoking a scandal, which would be abhorrent to me. His presence had something to do with the unhappy issue of my marriage. Above all, he hated my young legitimate heir from the first with a persistent hatred. You may well ask me why, under these circumstances, I still kept James under my roof. I answer that it was because I could see his mother's face in his, and that for her dear sake there was no end to my longsuffering. All her pretty ways, too—there was not one of them which he could not suggest and bring back to my memory. I *could* not send him away. But I feared so lest he should do Arthur—that is, Lord Saltire—a mischief that I despatched him for safety to Dr. Huxtable's school.

"James came into contact with this fellow Hayes because the man was a tenant of mine, and James acted as agent. The fellow was a rascal from the beginning; but in some extraordinary way James became intimate with him. He had always a taste for low company. When James determined to kidnap Lord Saltire it was of this man's service that he availed himself. You remember that I wrote to Arthur upon that last day. Well, James opened the letter and inserted a note asking Arthur to meet him in a little wood called the Ragged Shaw which is near to the school. He used the duchess's name, and in that way got the boy to come. That evening James cycled over—I am telling you what he has himself confessed to me—and he told Arthur, whom he met in the wood, that his mother longed to see him, that she was awaiting him on the moor, and that if he would come back into the wood at midnight he would find a man with a horse, who would take him to her. Poor Arthur fell into the trap. He came to the appointment, and found this fellow Hayes with a led pony. Arthur mounted, and they set off together. It appears—though this James only heard yesterday—that they were pursued, that Hayes struck the pursuer with his stick, and that the man died of his injuries. Hayes brought Arthur to his public-house, the 'Fighting Cock,' where he was confined in an upper room, under the care of Mrs. Hayes, who is a kindly woman, but entirely under the control of her brutal husband.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, that was the state of affairs when I first saw you two days ago. I had no more idea of the truth than you. You will ask me what was James's motive in doing such a deed. I answer that there was a great deal which was unreasoning and fanatical in the hatred which he bore my heir. In his view he should himself have been heir of all my estates, and he deeply resented those social laws which made it impossible. At the same time, he had a definite motive also. He was eager that I should break the entail, and he was of opinion that it lay in my power to do so. He intended to make a bargain with me—to restore Arthur if I would break the entail, and so make it possible for the estate to be left to him by will. He knew well that I should never willingly invoke the aid of the police against him. I say that he would have proposed such a bargain to me, but he did not actually do so, for events moved too quickly for him, and he had not time to put his plans into practice.

"What brought all his wicked scheme to wreck was your discovery of this man Heidegger's dead body. James was seized with horror at the news. It came to us yesterday as we sat together in this study. Dr. Huxtable had sent a telegram. James was so overwhelmed with grief and agitation that my suspicions, which had never been entirely absent, rose instantly to a certainty, and I taxed him with the deed. He made a complete voluntary confession. Then he implored me to keep his secret for three days longer, so as to give his wretched accomplice a chance of saving his guilty life. I yielded—as I have always yielded—to his prayers, and instantly James hurried off to the 'Fighting Cock' to warn Hayes and give him the means of flight. I could not go there by daylight without provoking comment, but as soon as night fell I hurried off to see my dear Arthur. I found him safe and well, but horrified beyond expression by the dreadful deed he had witnessed. In deference to my promise, and much against my will, I consented to leave him there for three days under the charge of Mrs. Hayes, since it was evident that it was impossible to inform the police where he was without telling them also who was the murderer, and I could not see how that murderer could be punished without ruin to my unfortunate James. You asked for frankness, Mr. Holmes, and I have taken you at your word, for I have now told you everything without an attempt at circumlocution or concealment. Do you in your turn be as frank with me."

"I will," said Holmes. "In the first place, your Grace, I am bound to tell you that you have placed yourself in a most serious position in the eyes of the law. You have condoned a felony, and you have aided the escape of a murderer; for I cannot doubt that any money which was taken by James

Wilder to aid his accomplice in his flight came from your Grace's purse."

The duke bowed his assent.

"This is indeed a most serious matter. Even more culpable, in my opinion, your Grace, is your attitude towards your younger son. You leave him in this den for three days."

"Under solemn promises——"

"What are promises to such people as these? You have no guarantee that he will not be spirited away again. To humour your guilty elder son you have exposed your innocent younger son to imminent and unnecessary danger. It was a most unjustifiable action."

The proud lord of Holdernesse was not accustomed to be so rated in his own ducal hall. The blood flushed into his high forehead, but his conscience held him dumb.

"I will help you, but on one condition only. It is that you ring for the footman and let me give such orders as I like."

Without a word the duke pressed the electric button. A servant entered.

"You will be glad to hear," said Holmes, "that your young master is found. It is the duke's desire that the carriage shall go at once to the Fighting Cock Inn to bring Lord Saltire home."

"Now," said Holmes, when the rejoicing lackey had disappeared, "having secured the future we can afford to be more lenient with the past. I am not in an official position, and there is no reason, so long as the ends of justice are served, why I should disclose all that I know. As to Hayes I say nothing. The gallows awaits him, and I would do nothing to save him from it. What he will divulge I cannot tell, but I have no doubt that your Grace could make him understand that it is to his interest to be silent. From the police point of view he will have kidnapped the boy for the purpose of ransom. If they do not themselves find it out I see no reason why I should prompt them to take a broader view. I would warn your Grace, however, that the continued presence of Mr. James Wilder in your household can only lead to misfortune."

"I understand that, Mr. Holmes, and it is already settled that he shall leave me for ever and go to seek his fortune in Australia."

"In that case, your Grace, since you have yourself stated that any unhappiness in your married life was caused by his presence, I would suggest that you make such amends as you can to the duchess, and that you try to resume those relations which have been so unhappily interrupted."

"That also I have arranged, Mr. Holmes. I wrote to the duchess this morning."

"In that case," said Holmes, rising, "I think that my friend and I can congratulate ourselves upon several most happy results from our little visit to the North. There is one other small point upon which I desire some light. This fellow Hayes had shod his horses with shoes which counterfeited the tracks of cows. Was it from Mr. Wilder that he learned so extraordinary a device?"

The duke stood in thought for a moment, with a look of intense surprise on his face. Then he opened a door and showed us into a large room furnished as a museum. He led the way to a glass case in a corner, and pointed to the inscription.

"These shoes," it ran, "were dug up in the moat of Holdernesse Hall. They are for the use of horses; but they are shaped below with a cloven foot of iron, so as to throw pursuers off the track. They are supposed to have belonged to some of the marauding Barons of Holdernesse in the Middle Ages."

Holmes opened the case, and, moistening his finger, he passed it along the shoe. A thin film of recent mud was left upon his skin.

"Thank you," said he, as he replaced the glass. "It is the second most interesting object that I have seen in the North."

"And the first?"

Holmes folded up his cheque, and placed it carefully in his notebook. "I am a poor man," said he, as he patted it affectionately, and thrust it into the depths of his inner pocket.

L. T. Meade and Robert Eustace

THE FACE IN THE DARK

from THE LONDON MAGAZINE, 1903

Permission to reprint is granted by Mr. Eustace

I AM AN unmarried man with sufficient means to support myself in a quiet way. I enjoy a bachelor's life, am fond of dabbling in literature, write occasionally for the Press, possess a fair knowledge of science, and produce the best photographs of any amateur that I know. I have no present intention of marrying, but I am by no means unsociable. I like the company of my fellow-men, and go a good deal into Society. My name is Laurence Hyne, and I am thirty-two years of age.

In these days of intense living no man who is not a confirmed hermit can shut himself away from strong situations, from moments of danger, or from hours when the world seems more or less to totter beneath him. I, like others, have had my due share of adventures of one sort and another, and the one I am about to tell was by no means the least curious of those that occurred to me.

On the 18th of a very hot June, I went to the reception of some friends of mine, the Sitwells, who lived in Berkeley Square. This was always a brilliant function, and I knew that I should meet many of my friends there. On this occasion there was one in particular, a young fellow of the name of Granby Manners, whom I particularly wished to shake once more by the hand. I had known him as a boy, and as his mother had been my dearest and most valued friend, I took an interest in him. He was an open-handed, unselfish, clever lad, but was also one of the most nervous boys I had ever come across. His ideas were lofty and aspiring, but his nerves hampered him, and to such an extent that, when still quite a lad, not more than seventeen, he was ordered abroad, where he had resided under the care of a tutor ever since. Mrs. Manners had been a sort of elder sister to me—she had

done me many good turns in life—had assisted me more than once, not only by her advice, but practically, and on her death-bed had charged me most emphatically to look after Granby, and if at any time I could do him a kindness, not to hesitate, for her sake, to do it.

"He is ten years your junior, don't forget that, Laurence," she said. "He knows little or nothing of English life. When the estate comes to him he will be surrounded by adventurers—help him if you can."

I promised faithfully, and now the time had come, for Granby's mother and father were both dead—the boy inherited the old Croftwood estates, and had come home to attend to business matters.

On the day of the Sitwells's function I received a letter from Lady Willoughby, Granby's aunt. She wrote from Scotland.

"My nephew is in London," she wrote. "Pray find him out and write to me with regard to his appearance, his prospects, his present ideas of life. He was always a strange boy and not at all a person to own a big estate like Croftwood Hall. I am unable to travel, as you know, but my dear sister told me on her death-bed that you had promised to be good to him. Pray do what you can and let me know."

Accordingly I went to the Sitwells primed in every way to see after young Manners. Mrs. Manners had had an unhappy life—her burden was a heavy one, so heavy that it had sent her to her grave before her time. The facts were these. Her husband was one of the worst of men—a drunkard, reckless, fast, extravagant. There were rumours of even darker vices—of deeds committed that ought never to have seen the light of day. Some people said that the man was half insane. Well, he was dead, and the boy was not in the least like him.

I arrived at the Sitwells in good time. The house was already full of guests and very soon I ran up against young Manners. He had a bright face, a refined, elegant appearance and an affectionate manner.

"I am glad to see you," he said to me. "This is quite like old times. Where can we go to have a long chat?"

"You must come to my rooms for that, Granby. But here—this terrace is empty for a few moments. Come and stand under this awning and let me look at you."

We went out through an open window and stood on a beautiful terrace screened by an awning and decked with flowers.

"You do look quite a man, Granby," I said. "Why, you must be two-and-twenty. Your hands must be pretty full of business now, my boy, with that big estate, and you the sole person to look after it."

"The fact is, Hyne," he answered, "I am so harried and rushed about that I have hardly a minute to call my own.

want to come to see you, and will at any hour you like to appoint."

"Here are two chairs," I said suddenly, for as he spoke I noticed the old nervous catch in his voice, and the quick movement of the head that spoke of a highly-strung system. "Sit down, won't you, Granby. You have a big story to tell me. Let's begin to hear it at once."

"Well," he answered, "there's a great deal to say. My father has left things involved, but, of course, they *may* come all right; I can't say. Sometimes I fear—sometimes I hope. Anyhow, I shall know soon. What day is this—the 18th. I shall know, I must know, before the 24th."

"What do you mean by that?" I asked in astonishment.

"I will tell you presently. I could not in this crowd."

He glanced nervously behind him.

"Come and dine with me to-morrow night," was my answer.

His face lit up with pleasure. He was about to reply in the affirmative when some people came on to the terrace. They were two girls, both handsome and total strangers to me. I saw, however, that Granby knew them. His face flushed with vivid colour, and his eyes grew dark with delight. He greeted both girls, and especially the slighter and smaller of the two, with effusion.

"This is good," he said; "I was just talking to a special friend of mine. May I introduce you?"

A moment later I was shaking the hand and looking into the face of the brightest and most capable girl probably in the whole of England. Her name was Angela Dickinson. She was the daughter of a well-known barrister, who would undoubtedly be appointed to a judgeship before long. She had only lately come out—had met Manners when abroad; they were great chums. Oh, yes, it was good to see him again. They smiled at each other, and young Manners and Miss Angela Dickinson went off together; the other girl, whose name was Muriel, fell to my share to entertain.

"I am so glad we have met Mr. Manners and that he looks so well," she said. "When we saw him at Naples he often appeared very much troubled. I am glad he has met an old friend in you."

"Yes," I replied. "I have known Granby since he was a little boy. His mother was one of my best friends. Granby had a sad childhood; his father—I suppose everyone knows about him."

She nodded and looked grave.

"The man is dead," I continued. "Let his ashes rest in peace. It seems to me, Miss Dickinson, that Manners's only fault is that he is extremely sensitive."

"I know that," she replied. "Angela and he are great friends."

I followed the direction of her eyes. The pair were standing closely together at the further end of the balcony.

"There is not a doubt that they care for each other," said Miss Muriel; "but up to the present no word has been spoken—at least to my father. I wish he would speak—his silence puts Angela in a strained position."

Soon afterwards I took my leave, going home to attend to some special business which was occupying me that night. Just as I was going downstairs young Manners bounded after me.

"May I come to-night instead of to-morrow night?" he said. "It doesn't matter about dinner. I want to talk things over with you."

I told him to come in about nine o'clock, and he nodded his acceptance.

Punctually to the hour he arrived, looking handsome and gentlemanly in his evening clothes. I offered him a pipe; he sat down and we both smoked in silence for a minute or two.

"Well," I said, suddenly—for I saw that it must be my business to lead the way—"I felt rather anxious about you when we sat together in the balcony; but Miss Dickinson has relieved all my fears. You are all right, Manners—I congratulate you most heartily on your future."

He wrung my hand but did not speak.

"I suppose the engagement will soon be announced?" I said, after a pause.

"Oh, we are not engaged, at least, not exactly. I'd give the world if it could be, but I don't see my way—there are difficulties, and monstrous ones. It is about those I want to talk to you."

"Well, speak up, old chap. I am interested in you from every point of view. Tell me everything and we will take counsel together."

He drew his chair close to mine.

"When were you last at Croftwood?" was his remark.

"Not for some years now—not since your mother's death. I grant that the old place is gloomy, but nevertheless I love it. In your hands it will assume a very different appearance. You can rebuild and redecorate. You can cut down sufficient timber to give the place more air, and not such a crowded-up appearance. Croftwood Hall will be, I am sure, a lovely place in your reign, Manners, and Miss Angela is the very girl to make you happy there."

"I love the place," he answered—"it has been in our family for hundreds of years. Nevertheless I dread it very much.

I had a terrible fright there and have never been the same since. Did you hear of it?"

"No," I answered, puzzled at his tone.

"It happened a long time ago now, and it was on account of that I was sent abroad. My mother and father were away at the time—my mother was ordered to the sea for her health. You know, of course, that the old place is supposed to be haunted?"

"Most old places are," I answered in some heat. "But really, Manners, at this time of day to talk of haunted houses means nonsense. No old family seat is complete without its ghost. But what of that—no one really believes in the unearthly visitant."

"Some people do," he said with a shudder. "Well, let me tell you. My father and mother were both away—my mother wanted me to go to her, but my father refused. You know what a brute he was."

"Hush," I said, "he is dead."

"Dead or alive, I must speak the truth—he was a brute. I dreaded and hated him, but I worshipped my mother. I was terribly put out at being left behind. I was a big lad—fifteen at the time, but I cried myself ill. The house was horribly lonely, and there were only two servants—old Tarring, the butler, who is still there, and the cook. Half the rooms were shut up. The days were terrible and the long evenings were enough to turn one's brain. I had not even a book to read, for my father had locked up the library. I had not a friend to speak to, there was not a young person anywhere within miles. My nervousness, always a big thing, got worse. I lost my sleep—I used to wander about the old house half the night. On one special night I was so bad that I could not eat any dinner, and afterwards I had a fit of shivering and fancied I saw things whenever I looked up. I rang for Tarring at last and begged of him, for God's sake, to keep me company. You know him, of course, a bent old party with a nose like a beak. He came up and looked into my face and said solemnly:

" 'Master Granby, if this goes on you will be mad soon.'

" 'What do you mean?' I asked, looking at him with terror.

" 'You have madness in your eyes, sir, and you inherit it—don't you forget that. There's that gentleman, your great-great-uncle, whose portrait is in the picture gallery. He died in Bedlam. You'd best go and look at his picture and be warned. A young gentleman like you ought to be happy. He should come to his meals with appetite and sleep sound o' nights. Take my advice, sir, think no more about nerves or fancies, or they will be your undoing.'

"He went away, having positively refused to stay with me another moment, declaring that my face gave him the blues

and that he preferred cook's company in the kitchen. I thought I would go to bed and drown my terrors in sleep. I covered myself well up with the bedclothes, but I could not rest. You remember the picture gallery at Croftwood, don't you, Hyne?"

"Perfectly well," I replied.

"It is on the ground floor, and occupies almost the whole west wing of the house. It communicates with the chapel at one end and with the dining-hall on the other. I lay with my eyes wide open, my heart beating like a hammer, and my thoughts full of my mad great-uncle. Suddenly I remembered that his name was also Granby Manners. I took an unhealthy desire to look at his face. It could not be combated. I got up, and candle in hand went down through the old house. At last I found myself in the picture gallery. You know those deep embrasures near the mullioned windows?"

I nodded.

"The picture was at the end close to the old chapel. Just as I got up to it, I saw someone standing behind me—someone in black—with a hood on. The whole thing was over in a minute, for I fainted away. But I remember now as distinctly as though it were only just happening, that the figure spoke and with outstretched hands pointed at me and said:

" *'Granby Manners, you will die in this room!'*

"My screams must have brought old Tarring. I was taken to my bedroom, the doctor was summoned, and I was in bed in danger of brain fever for many weeks. My mother got better and returned home. When I saw her I told her exactly what had happened. She was full of sympathy and tenderness and love. She took immediate steps and I was sent abroad with a tutor. We went from one sunny land to another, and I began to forget my troubles and grew strong and healthy once again. Then came the terrible news of my mother's death —I should never see my darling more. I was stricken to the earth—I resolved never to return to England. But two years after my father died, and the lawyers wrote and said that I must return home at once. I found the estate terribly involved, in short, the outlook is most gloomy."

"Have you told this strange story to Miss Dickinson?" I asked.

"I have. She knows everything. She knows that we cannot be engaged until things clear up a bit. If they never do, which is more than probable, I must give her up. Yes, I must, however hard it may be. As to the story of my mad ancestor, I do not think much about it. There has not been a second case of insanity in the family—so that goes for nothing; but I cannot ask Mr. Dickinson for Angela when I have no money to support her with."

"Surely that sounds ridiculous," I said. "You, as owner of Croftwood Hall, must have plenty of money."

"That is the point, Hyne," he replied. "The complications are enormous. I will come to that presently; but as we are talking of nerves and fancies, may I tell you something else? You have heard, of course, of the Croftwood Elm?"

I nodded. He was alluding to an enormous elm, of great age, which grew by itself just within sight of the house. There was a superstition in the old place that a branch from this elm always fell before the owner's death.

"I was at Croftwood last week," continued Granby. "The gardeners were clearing away the great branch which had fallen from the elm two days before my father's death."

"Well," I said, "you are not going to think anything of that. It was merely a coincidence. Gales of wind will break off the branches of old trees to the end of time. Come, Manners, I am ashamed that you should pin your faith to such rubbish. But tell me, when are you going to Croftwood again?"

"To-morrow."

"What! To-morrow! May I come with you?"

"Would you come?"

His face lighted up with intense pleasure.

"That would be splendid," he said. "I can't tell you how I hate these visits. A great deal hangs on what takes place in the next few days. Poltimore will be there. He is the horrible man to whom the estate is mortgaged."

"Croftwood Hall mortgaged?" I cried.

"Yes, and up to the hilt. I shall be awfully glad to tell you. Of course, what I say is in confidence. I don't want the whole world to know that I am a pauper."

"You cannot be that," I answered; "but anyhow, you can trust me."

"I will tell you everything to-morrow," was his answer.

He rose as he spoke, and soon afterwards took his leave.

According to my appointment, I met the lad at Waterloo the following day. We reached Croftwood soon after six o'clock. It was a lovely day, bright and not too warm, and as we drove through the park the old trees in their summer greenery restored many memories to my mind.

"Here we are," cried Granby, as the dog-cart put us down at the porch, where the old butler was waiting to receive us.

A more decrepit, bent old man I had never seen. His hooked nose, his distorted, claw-like hands, gave him the appearance more of a bird of ill-omen than anything else. As he glanced with a fixed and by no means amiable expression from Granby to myself, I observed that his eyes were keen, bright, and sharp as a needle. Whatever else had happened to old Tarring, his intellect was still well to the fore. Tarring knew me, although

he pretended to regard me as a total stranger, and evidently viewed me with small favour.

"Are there no letters?" asked Manners.

"The post won't be in just yet, sir."

"Well, Tarring, Mr. Hyne has come to stay with me. See that you get a room ready for him. Now, Hyne, let us have a stroll before dinner. Doesn't the place look lovely just now? By the way, you have never met Mr. Poltimore. He was a great friend of my father's. I will tell you how my affairs stand before we see him."

We strolled off through one of the gardens.

"The situation is far worse than you have any idea of," he began. "I will endeavour to explain. No one knows exactly what my father's life was, but there is no doubt that on a certain night he got into a most terrible affair in London. Nobody knows what he did, but it was necessary for him to have twenty thousand pounds in cash that night. It was that or suicide. He obtained the sum, how I don't know, from Mr. Poltimore, who is a rich jewel merchant in the city.

"In exchange for the money my father gave the man a document, all duly attested and witnessed—a sort of mortgage on Croftwood. It is to this effect. That Mr. Poltimore holds the place as security for his money, and the mortgager has to pay 10 per cent. on the loan. There are arrears of interest now amounting to ten thousand pounds. This sum has to be paid on Midsummer day, or according to the mortgage, Mr. Poltimore seizes the property, which is worth not less than a hundred thousand pounds. But there is another and more terrible clause. It is this: even if the interest *is* paid regularly, I shall only have the place for my life, after that it passes altogether into Poltimore's hands, or into the hands of his heirs. If the arrears of interest can be paid by Midsummer day all will be well as far as I am concerned, but no child of mine can ever inherit the place. You must see for yourself that under such conditions I can't ask Angela Dickinson to be my wife."

"I am not surprised," I answered. "But have you no reasonable hope that your lawyers will raise the money?"

"They say they will do their best. But it is by no means easy."

"Suppose they fail—have you no other means of getting the money?"

"No," he answered. "I once purchased some shares in a gold mine, and I think they will, in time, bring me in a lot of money, but of course it is all a speculation, and I don't suppose anyone would lend on the chance."

"I see," I replied. "And of course it is very much to Mr. Poltimore's advantage that you should not pay the interest on

Midsummer day, for he would then have a place worth one hundred thousand pounds for twenty thousand."

"Quite so," was his reply.

Our stroll had led us by this time to the old elm tree.

"Ah," cried Manners, "look for yourself. Here is the place where the branch fell before my father's death."

We struck off across the grass towards the gnarled old tree.

"I thought they had cleared it away before now, but it is still there. How odd."

We were standing exactly under the tree, and a big branch, looking very fresh and green, lay beneath it at our feet. Granby's face turned white.

"Another branch," he cried. "What does this mean?"

"Nothing, except a fresh gale," was my answer.

"You don't understand," he replied impatiently. "A branch of the old elm always falls before the death of the owner. I am the present owner. What does this allude to?"

"Come away, and don't be nonsensical," were the words which crowded to my lips, but before I could utter them a bass voice, loud and ringing, sounded through the trees.

"Hullo!" it called.

I glanced up with relief at the interruption, and saw a tall, heavily-built man in corduroys approaching us rapidly.

"Hullo, Granby," he cried. "Just come down, eh? How seedy you look—white as a turnip. What's the matter?"

"Nothing, thanks. Let me introduce you to my friend, Mr. Laurence Hyne, Mr. Poltimore."

Poltimore raised his hat. I thought I had never seen a more disagreeable face. He eyed me with small favour and turned again to the boy.

"Is your friend coming to stay?" he asked somewhat pointedly.

"Certainly. As my guest," said Granby, in a low tone.

Poltimore uttered a mocking laugh.

"Your guest, forsooth," he said. "By the way, have you had that letter?"

"No, but it may come by this evening's post."

"You will be out of suspense at least, after you have heard," said Poltimore.

He glanced round with a frown at me, and we turned towards the house. As we entered it, Tarring approached and handed Manners a letter in a blue envelope.

"Ah, here it is," he cried.

He turned aside to open it, his fingers shaking. Poltimore watched him with intense excitement.

"Well," he said impatiently, "what is the news?"

"Good news for you, Mr. Poltimore," said Granby then. "There need be no secret," he continued, and he glanced from

me to the other man. "The loan cannot be raised, therefore in four days this house is yours."

Poltimore raised his hand and brought it down again with great force on his thigh.

"It's an ill wind that blows nobody good," he said. "Upon my soul, I am sorry for you, lad, but I can't pretend that I'm not pleased on my own account at the turn events are taking. No offense to you, Mr. Hyne, but when the property comes into my hands I choose my own guests. You understand, sir. Now I'm off to the village. Don't wait dinner for me."

He went away with a great stride, banging the heavy oak door after him.

Manners turned to me. "Isn't he a brute?" he said. "But for my sake you will try to endure him, Hyne."

"My dear lad, Poltimore is nothing to me, nothing whatever, except as far as you are concerned. But show me that letter. I don't believe that the worst can have happened."

"But it has," he answered, and he handed me the letter, the contents of which had so elated Mr. Poltimore.

I read it; it ran as follows:—

> "Dear Sir,—We regret to inform you that we cannot raise the money. The shares in the mine you hold are of no value as security. The estate will therefore pass to Mr. Poltimore on Midsummer day."

"But surely," I cried, "it would be possible to find twenty thousand pounds in order to let you keep the property. To tell you the truth, Manners, I don't believe in that extraordinary document your father signed. At least, I should like to have a good look at it. The estate is entailed."

"Yes; but he broke the entail."

"How so? How is that possible? He could not do it without your permission, and you were not of age."

"He sent me a paper to sign on my twenty-first birthday. I never even guessed what it was, and signed practically without reading, but now I am certain it was that, and I signed away my birthright."

I could not help feeling a sense of dismay. Manners had no more notion of business than an infant.

I thought hard during the remainder of that evening, and at last it suddenly occurred to me to consult no less a man than Mr. Dickinson, the father of Miss Angela. I determined to tell Granby of my resolution.

"You shan't want a friend at this juncture," I said. "If I had the money I would lend it to you with a heart and a half, and think myself well off, too," I added, "for Croftwood Hall is admirable security for any loan. But I have nothing like that

amount at my command, so there is no good wasting time over that thought. The place, however, is worth saving, even if you had nothing to do with it. We don't want an old family place to get into the hands of a scoundrel of Poltimore's sort. Now I propose to go to London to-morrow, for there is, as you are aware, not a moment to lose, and when there I shall consult Dickinson."

"What?" cried Granby. "Angela's father?"

"The same."

He looked uncomfortable, started up, and began to pace the room. "You—would not surely tell him—about——?"

"You must leave that to me, my boy. Whatever happens, I must have an open hand. You cannot be worse off than you are now, and it would be impossible for Dickinson to despise you for loving his daughter."

The poor fellow covered his face with his hands and groaned.

"I am off in the morning to do what I can," I said. "In the meantime, stay here and await events."

I was sorry afterwards that I had not insisted on taking him with me: but how could I foretell the horrible future.

I reached home soon after eleven o'clock, and telephoned immediately to Dickinson to know if he could see me. I had a reply in the affirmative, and went to his chambers soon after noon.

"Come out and have lunch with me," he said heartily, "and then you can tell me what it is all about. Young Manners and the Croftwood estate! But surely that is a fine property?"

"It is if we can rescue it," I replied, "and it is for that purpose I want to consult you."

We lunched in his favourite coffee house off the Strand, and I told Dickinson as much as I thought necessary of the story. He was a middle-aged man, with a staid, reserved face. It was difficult to understand how he could be the sparkling and vivacious Angela's father. He sat quietly after my communication had come to an end, then he said abruptly:

"Have you told me everything?"

I looked at him and resolved to trust him.

"There is one thing I have left out," I said. "It is this. Young Manners loves your youngest daughter as faithfully and truly as a man can love a woman. He would make her a good husband, and Croftwood is not to be despised."

"That is true," answered Dickinson. "I don't know what can be done, but I will consult my solicitor. If anyone can help you, Wantage is the man. Stay, I will give you a letter to take to him at once. You can explain matters more quickly than I could, and there isn't a moment to lose."

"The worst happens on Midsummer day, and this is the 20th. We have only four days."

He gave a low, significant whistle, then dashed off a few words to Wantage and put the letter into my hands.

Wantage was busy in his office in Lincoln's Inn. He was a little red-headed, freckled, elderly man, with a keen face, an observant eye, and manner which expressed nothing. He was very busy, as numerous clerks testified, but Dickinson's letter was *Open Sesame,* and I was allowed to see him almost immediately.

"A curious case," he said, after we had talked for over an hour. "Will you kindly leave me now, Mr. Hyne, and come back about this time to-morrow. I can give you my answer then—yes or no."

There was nothing for it but to comply. I spent the evening at my club, slept as best I could during the night that followed, and punctually to the moment was back with Wantage in the afternoon of the twenty-first. I was taken at once into his presence. He shut the door and locked it.

"I have not been idle since I saw you," he said to me. "I have been making enquiries with regard to those gold reefs. I have also heard several things by no means to Poltimore's credit. I do not believe that at the worse he can uphold his claim. It is my very firm impression that the law wants him and sooner than he has any idea of. At any rate, one thing must be done—the cheque must be paid. I will let you have the amount. I heard, on the whole, favourable accounts with regard to those gold reefs. Croftwood is worth saving, the young man is worth rescuing. Now, if you will help me, the thing can be done."

"No fear of my not helping you," I answered cheerfully. "I would almost cut off my right hand to help that boy."

"Thanks, Mr. Hyne," he said, gazing at me critically and almost with a quizzical expression. "You are a good friend."

"His mother was a good friend to me."

"Ah, I respect you, Mr. Hyne. Well, this is your part in the matter. The cheque must be paid to you, and you must pay it to Poltimore. The lad himself must have nothing to do with it. You must accept Poltimore's letter of release. This is a matter for a lawyer, however, and if you are going down to Croftwood to-morrow I shall have pleasure in accompanying you. Poltimore may play tricks with Manners, and possibly also with you; but I do not think he will dare to try them on with me. Will you be ready to accompany me to Croftwood Hall to-morrow?"

"Certainly," I said.

We talked a little longer; matters were finally arranged, and I left in high spirits.

On my way home it occurred to me that I would wire to Granby.

I accordingly sent the following very cheerful message:

"All right. Money will be raised. Coming down with solicitor to-morrow. Cheer up.—LAURENCE HYNE."

The rest of the day passed as usual. It was not until nine o'clock, just after I had returned from dining at my club, that all of a sudden it flashed upon me what a deadly and dangerous thing I had done in sending that wire to Granby. I sprang from my chair. Manners would, of course, tell Poltimore, and the man would be beside himself with rage and disappointment. Beyond doubt, Poltimore was in a most serious position; his own affairs were so critical that if he did not get relief soon, such as the Croftwood estate would furnish him with, he would go under, how deeply and how far I could not guess; but he would be submerged—ruined. As far as he was concerned, everything depended on whether young Manners was able to pay him by Midsummer day, or—great heavens! there was another alternative. Should Granby Manners *die* before Midsummer day, Poltimore would be equally safe—indeed, more safe than if the arrears of interest were paid. Then, beyond doubt, the estate would be his. He would be a rich man. Should Granby die, Poltimore would have attained the utmost height of his ambition. The position was too fearful to contemplate quietly. I, who had hoped to liberate the boy from all his troubles, had, by sending that telegram, in all possibility sealed his death warrant. A desperate and cruel man with no principle would do anything. Then there was that scoundrelly butler, a coward without a scrap of conscience. He had always hated the boy. I saw hatred in his eyes when he greeted us both at Croftwood Hall. Yes, beyond doubt, Manners was in the gravest danger.

It was impossible for me to rest. Late as it was, I found myself ten minutes afterwards in a hansom cab. I had determined to catch the ten o'clock train from Waterloo. Not an instant's delay must keep me from the place. I would wire to Wantage in the morning. He could come down and the necessary business could be transacted. But I, in the meantime, would be on the spot to prevent mischief.

I am not given to nervous fancies, but I must confess that during that railway journey to Croftwood station I had about as bad a time as a man often lives through. There was the lonely deserted house, steeped in all its superstitions; there was the supposed ghost; there was the villain who would stop at nothing; there was his tool, the old butler; and there was the boy himself, nervous, highly strung, innocent.

The train seemed to crawl—it stopped at every station. By the time I reached Croftwood station it was nearly one o'clock. There was no fly to be had—there was nothing for it but to finish my journey on foot. I knew my way well, and struck off along the country lanes at a brisk pace. The night was fine with a high wind. Scuds of broken cloud raced across the moon, giving alternate moments of bright light followed by darkness.

At last I turned up the avenue and finally reached the house. There was no light in any of the windows. I determined not to ring the bell, but to make my way round to the left under some close-growing shrubberies. I thought it extremely probable that I could enter by the old chapel, a place no longer used either for prayer or praise. No one would think of the chapel, or be concerned as to whether the heavy oak door was locked or not. I had observed that it was unlocked when with Granby two days ago. Now it yielded to my pressure. I went straight through the chapel. This led me into the picture gallery, at the further end of which was a secret door by which I could eventually reach Granby's room.

As I walked quickly down the long picture gallery, the greater part of which was in intense darkness, the windows having been all barred and bolted, I suddenly paused and listened. Something had broken the silence. What could it be? It sounded like low guttural breathing. My heart beat fast as I advanced, then it almost stopped, for hanging unsupported and brought into relief by a long ray of moonlight which fell through a badly-fitting shutter, was a face within a few feet of my own. Oh God!—the face was *upside down*, while breath passed quickly between the anguished lips. It was the face of Granby.

This scene lasted for only a minute; before I could speak everything was changed—a bright light flooded the apartment, and Poltimore, a candle in his hand, approached from the dining hall end. Granby was hanging by his feet. I rushed at the villain—a desperate encounter took place.

"What is this, you scoundrel?" I shouted.

He swung me off with the strength of a man nearly double my size, pushed the old butler towards me and dashed away. The latter I seized.

"Help me at once, Tarring," I cried, "or I'll wring your neck. Save Mr. Granby—what are you about, man? Be quick!"

His face was ghastly, but he spoke no word. We worked quietly. A step-ladder stood behind us and a few moments later Manners lay upon the floor, still breathing, but unconscious.

"Go and fetch brandy," I cried.

The man disappeared and soon returned with a decanter

and a glass. I poured a little down the boy's throat, and he opened his eyes.

A few hours later Granby was able to tell his own story. "I got your telegram, and was nearly mad with joy," he said. "Poltimore found me holding it in my hand. He rushed at me, seized the sheet, and read the news. I shall never forget his face. It was just as though I were in Hades, and saw the face of a lost spirit. But before I had time to realise anything he had caught me in his powerful grip. He said something to Tarring, who was not far off and they carried me away with them to the picture gallery. I think I fainted, for when I came to myself I was tied by the ankles to the beam. What I lived through during the next awful hours I can never by any possibility explain."

The doctor when he arrived made it clear that death must have ensued in a very short time. This would have been caused by the enormous congestion of the brain. The cunningness of the mode of murder was made apparent when the doctor further said that after the boy died and the body was lowered down, there would not be the slightest trace apparent to anyone of what had happened.

Both Poltimore and Tarring were arrested, and are now undergoing a term of penal servitude.

As to Granby, his friends clustered round him, and the estate was put on a firm basis. He is about to marry Angela Dickinson in a short time. The shares in the gold reef have also turned out trumps, and the owner of Croftwood Hall will once more be a very rich man.

In the bright, calm, handsome fellow, who shows not a trace of fear or nervousness, who is happy of the happy, and gay of the gay, few would recognise the boy whom I was the means of rescuing from the most terrible death.

Ernest Bramah

THE GHOST AT MASSINGHAM MANSIONS

from THE EYES OF MAX CARRADOS

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"DO YOU BELIEVE in ghosts, Max?" inquired Mr. Carlyle.

"Only as ghosts," replied Carrados with decision.

"Quite so," assented the private detective with the air of acquiescence with which he was wont to cloak his moments of obfuscation. Then he added cautiously: "And how don't you believe in them, pray?"

"As public nuisances—or private ones for that matter," replied his friend. "So long as they are content to behave as ghosts I am with them. When they begin to meddle with a state of existence that is outside their province—to interfere in business matters and depreciate property—to rattle chains, bang doors, ring bells, predict winners, and to edit magazines —and to attract attention instead of shunning it, I cease to believe. My sympathies are entirely with the sensible old fellow who was awakened in the middle of the night to find a shadowy form standing by the side of his bed and silently regarding him. For a few minutes the disturbed man waited patiently, expecting some awful communication, but the same profound silence was maintained. 'Well,' he remarked at length, 'if you have nothing to do, I have,' and turning over went to sleep again."

"I have been asked to take up a ghost," Carlyle began to explain.

"Then I don't believe in it," declared Carrados.

"Why not?"

"Because it is a pushful, notoriety-loving ghost, or it would not have gone so far. Probably it wants to get into the *Daily Mail*. The other people, whoever they are, don't believe in it either, Louis, or they wouldn't have called you in. They would have gone to Sir Oliver Lodge for an explanation, or to the nearest priest for a stoup of holy water."

"I admit that I shall direct my researches towards the forces of this world before I begin to investigate any other," conceded Louis Carlyle. "And I don't doubt," he added, with his usual bland complacence, "that I shall hale up some mischievous or aggrieved individual before the ghost is many days older. Now that you have brought me so far, do you care to go on round to the place with me, Max, to hear what they have to say about it?"

Carrados agreed with his usual good nature. He rarely met his friend without hearing the details of some new case, for Carlyle's practice had increased vastly since the night when chance had led him into the blind man's study. They discussed the cases according to their interest, and there the matter generally ended so far as Max Carrados was concerned, until he casually heard the result subsequently from Carlyle's lips or learned the sequel from the newspaper. But these pages are primarily a record of the methods of the one man whose name they bear and therefore for the occasional case that Carrados completed for his friend there must be assumed the unchronicled scores which the enquiry agent dealt capably with himself. This reminder is perhaps necessary to dissipate the impression that Louis Carlyle was a pretentious humbug. He was, as a matter of fact, in spite of his amiable foibles and the self-assurance that was, after all, merely an asset of his trade, a shrewd and capable business man of his world, and behind his office manner nothing concerned him more than pocket fees for which he felt that he had failed to render value.

Massingham Mansions proved to be a single block of residential flats overlooking a recreation ground. It was, as they afterwards found, an adjunct to a larger estate of similar property situated down another road. A porter, residing in the basement, looked after the interests of Massingham Mansions; the business office was placed among the other flats. On that morning it presented the appearance of a well-kept prosperous enough place, a little dull, a little unfinished, a little depressing perhaps; in fact faintly reminiscent of the superfluous mansions that stand among broad, weedy roads on the outskirts of overgrown seaside resorts; but it was persistently raining at the time when Mr. Carlyle had his first view of it.

"It is early to judge," he remarked, after stopping to

car in order to verify the name on the brass plate, "but, upon my word, Max, I really think that our ghost might have discovered more appropriate quarters."

At the office, to which the porter had directed them, they found a managing clerk and two coltish youths in charge. Mr. Carlyle's name produced an appreciable flutter.

"The governor isn't here just now, but I have this matter in hand," said the clerk with an easy air of responsibility—an effect unfortunately marred by a sudden irrepressible giggle from the least overawed of the colts. "Will you kindly step into our private room?" He turned at the door of the inner office and dropped a freezing eye on the offender. "Get those letters copied before you go out to lunch, Binns," he remarked in a sufficiently loud voice. Then he closed the door quickly, before Binns could find a suitable retort.

So far it had been plain sailing, but now, brought face to face with the necessity of explaining, the clerk began to develop some hesitancy in beginning.

"It's a funny sort of business," he remarked, skirting the difficulty.

"Perhaps," admitted Mr. Carlyle; "but that will not embarrass us. Many of the cases that pass through my hands are what you would call 'funny sorts of business.'"

"I suppose so," responded the young man, "but not through ours. Well, this is at 11 Massingham. A few nights ago—I suppose it must be more than a week now—Willett, the estate porter, was taking up some luggage to 75 Northanger for the people there when he noticed a light in one of the rooms at 11 Massingham. The backs face, though about twenty or thirty yards away. It struck him as curious, because 11 Massingham is empty and locked up. Naturally he thought at first that the porter at Massingham or one of us from the office had gone up for something. Still it was so unusual—being late at night—that it was his business to look into it. On his way round—you know where Massingham Mansions are?—he had to pass here. It was dark, for we'd all been gone hours, but Willett has duplicate keys and he let himself in. Then he began to think that something must be wrong, for here, hanging up against their number on the board, were the only two keys of 11 Massingham that there are supposed to be. He put the keys in his pocket and went on to Massingham. Green, the resident porter there, told him that he hadn't been into No. 11 for a week. What was more, no one had passed the outer door, in or out, for a good half-hour. He knew that, because the door 'springs' with a noise when it is opened, no matter how carefully. So the two of them went up. The door of No. 11 was locked and inside everything was as it should be. There was no light then, and after looking well round with the lanterns that

they carried they were satisfied that no one was concealed there."

"You say lanterns," interrupted Mr. Carlyle. "I suppose they lit the gas, or whatever it is there, as well?"

"It is gas, but they could not light it because it was cut off at the meter. We always cut it off when a flat becomes vacant."

"What sort of a light was it, then, that Willett saw?"

"It was gas, Mr. Carlyle. It is possible to see the bracket in that room from 75 Northanger. He saw it burning."

"Then the meter had been put on again?"

"It is in a locked cupboard in the basement. Only the office and the porters have keys. They tried the gas in the room and it was dead out; they looked at the meter in the basement afterwards and it was dead off."

"Very good," observed Mr. Carlyle, noting the facts in his pocket-book. "What next?"

"The next," continued the clerk, "was something that had really happened before. When they got down again—Green and Willett—Green was rather chipping Willett about seeing the light, you know, when he stopped suddenly. He'd remembered something. The day before the servant at 12 Massingham had asked him who it was that was using the bathroom at No. 11—she of course knowing that it was empty. He told her that no one used the bathroom. 'Well,' she said, 'we hear the water running and splashing almost every night and it's funny with no one there.' He had thought nothing of it at the time, concluding—as he told her—that it must be the water in the bathroom of one of the underneath flats that they heard. Of course he told Willett then and they went up again and examined the bathroom more closely. Water had certainly been run there, for the sides of the bath were still wet. They tried the taps and not a drop came. When a flat is empty we cut off the water like the gas."

"At the same place—the cupboard in the basement?" enquired Carlyle.

"No; at the cistern in the roof. The trap is at the top of the stairs and you need a longish ladder to get there. The next morning Willett reported what he'd seen and the governor told me to look into it. We didn't think much of it so far. That night I happened to be seeing some friends to the station here—I live not so far off—and I thought I might as well take a turn round here on my way home. I knew that if a light was burning I should be able to see the window lit up from the yard at the back, although the gas itself would be out of sight. And, sure enough, there was the light blazing out of one of the windows of No. 11. I won't say that I didn't feel a bit home-sick then, but I'd made up my mind to go up."

"Good man," murmured Mr. Carlyle approvingly.

"Wait a bit," recommended the clerk, with a shame-faced laugh. "So far I had only had to make my mind up. It was then close on midnight and not a soul about. I came here for the keys, and I aiso had the luck to remember an old revolver that had been lying about in a drawer of the office for years. It wasn't loaded, but it didn't seem quite so lonely with it. I put it in my pocket and went on to Massingham, taking another turn into the yard to see that the light was still on. Then I went up the stairs as quietly as I could and let myself into No. 11."

"You didn't take Willett or Green with you?"

The clerk gave Mr. Carlyle a knowing look, as of one smart man who will be appreciated by another.

"Willett's a very trustworthy chap," he replied, "and we have every confidence in him. Green also, although he has not been with us so long. But I thought it just as well to do it on my own, you understand, Mr. Carlyle. You didn't look in at Massingham on your way? Well, if you had you would have seen that there is a pane of glass above every door, frosted glass to the hall doors and plain over each of those inside. It's to light the halls and passages, you know. Each flat has a small square hall and a longish passage leading off it. As soon as I opened the door I could tell that one of the rooms down the passage was lit up, though I could not see the door of it from there. Then I crept very quietly through the hall into the passage. A regular stream of light was shining from above the end door on the left. The room, I knew, was the smallest in the flat—it's generally used for a servant's bedroom or sometimes for a box-room. It was a bit thick, you'll admit—right at the end of a long passage and midnight, and after what the others had said."

"Yes, yes," assented the enquiry agent. "But you went on?"

"I went on, tiptoeing without a sound. I got to the door, took out my pistol, put my hand almost on the handle and then——"

"Well, well," prompted Mr. Carlyle, as the narrator paused provokingly, with the dramatic instinct of an expert raconteur, "what then?"

"Then the light went out; while my hand was within an inch of the handle the light went out, as clean as if I had been watched all along and the thing timed. It went out all at once, without any warning and without the slightest sound from the beastly room beyond. And then it was as black as hell in the passage and something seemed to be going to happen."

"What did you do?"

"I did a slope," acknowledged the clerk frankly. "I broke all the records down that passage, I bet you. You'll laugh, I dare say, and think you would have stood, but you don't know

what it was like. I'd been screwing myself up, wondering what I should see in that lighted room when I opened the door, and then the light went out like a knife, and for all I knew the next second the door would open on me in the dark and Christ only knows what come out."

"Probably I should have run also," conceded Mr. Carlyle tactfully. "And you, Max?"

"You see, I always feel at home in the dark," apologised the blind man. "At all events you got safely away, Mr.——?"

"My name's Elliott," responded the clerk. "Yes, you may bet I did. Whether the door opened and anybody or anything came out or not I can't say. I didn't look. I certainly did get an idea that I heard the bath water running and swishing as I snatched at the hall door, but I didn't stop to consider that either, and if it was, the noise was lost in the slam of the door and my clatter as I took about twelve flights of stairs six steps at a time. Then when I was safely out I did venture to go round to look up again, and there was that damned light full on again."

"Really?" commented Mr. Carlyle. "That was very audacious of him."

"Him? Oh, well, yes, I suppose so. That's what the governor insists, but he hasn't been up there himself in the dark."

"Is that as far as you have got?"

"It's as far as we can get. The bally thing goes on just as it likes. The very next day we tied up the taps of the gas-meter and the water cistern and sealed the string. Bless you, it didn't make a ha'peth of difference. Scarcely a night passes without the light showing, and there's no doubt that the water runs. We've put copying ink on the door handles and the taps and got into it ourselves until there isn't a man about the place that you couldn't implicate."

"Has anyone watched up there?"

"Willett and Green together did one night. They shut themselves up in the room opposite from ten till twelve and nothing happened. I was watching the window with a pair of opera-glasses from an empty flat here—85 Northanger. Then they chucked it, and before they could have been down the steps the light was there—I could see the gas as plain as I can see this ink-stand. I ran down and met them coming to tell me that nothing had happened. The three of us sprinted up again and the light was out and the flat as deserted as a churchyard. What do you make of that?"

"It certainly requires looking into," replied Mr. Carlyle diplomatically.

"Looking into! Well, you're welcome to look all day and all night too, Mr. Carlyle. It isn't as though it was an old baronial mansion, you see, with sliding panels and secret

passages. The place has the date over the front door, 1882—1882 and haunted, by gosh! It was built for what it is, and there isn't an inch unaccounted for between the slates and the foundation."

"These two things—the lights and the water running—are the only indications there have been?" asked Mr. Carlyle.

"So far as we ourselves have seen or heard. I ought perhaps to tell you of something else, however. When this business first started I made a few casual enquiries here and there among the tenants. Among others I saw Mr. Belting, who occupies 9 Massingham—the flat directly beneath No. 11. It didn't seem any good making up a cock-and-bull story, so I put it to him plainly—had he been annoyed by anything unusual going on at the empty flat above?

"'If you mean your confounded ghost up there, I have not been particularly annoyed,' he said at once, 'but Mrs. Belting has, and I should advise you to keep out of her way, at least until she gets another servant.' Then he told me that their girl, who slept in the bedroom underneath the little one at No. 11, had been going on about noises in the room above—footsteps and tramping and a bump on the floor—for some time before we heard anything of it. Then one day she suddenly said that she'd had enough of it and bolted. That was just before Willett first saw the light."

"It is being talked about, then—among the tenants?"

"You bet!" assented Mr. Elliott pungently. "That's what gets the governor. He wouldn't give a continental if no one knew, but you can't tell where it will end. The people at Northanger don't half like it either. All the children are scared out of their little wits and none of the slaveys will run errands after dark. It'll give the estate a bad name for the next three years if it isn't stopped."

"It shall be stopped," declared Mr. Carlyle impressively. "Of course we have our methods for dealing with this sort of thing, but in order to make a clean sweep it is desirable to put our hands on the offender *in flagranti delicto*. Tell your—er—principal not to have any further concern in the matter. One of my people will call here for any further details that he may require during the day. Just leave everything as it is in the meanwhile. Good-morning, Mr. Elliott, good-morning. . . . A fairly obvious game, I imagine, Max," he commented as they got into the car, "although the details are original and the motive not disclosed as yet. I wonder how many of them are in it?"

"Let me know when you find out," said Carrados, and Mr. Carlyle promised.

Nearly a week passed and the expected revelation failed to

make its appearance. Then, instead, quite a different note arrived:

"My Dear Max,—I wonder if you formed any conclusion of that Massingham Mansions affair from Mr. Elliott's refined narrative of the circumstances?

"I begin to suspect that Trigget, whom I put on, is somewhat of an ass, though a very remarkable circumstance has come to light which might—if it wasn't a matter of business—offer an explanation of the whole business by stamping it as inexplicable.

"You know how I value your suggestions. If you happen to be in the neighborhood—not otherwise, Max, I protest—I should be glad if you would drop in for a chat.

"Yours sincerely,
"Louis Carlyle."

Carrados smiled at the ingenuous transparency of the note. He had thought several times of the case since the interview with Elliott, chiefly because he was struck by certain details of the manifestation that divided it from the ordinary methods of the bogy-raiser, an aspect that had apparently made no particular impression on his friend. He was sufficiently interested not to let the day pass without "happening" to be in the neigbourhood of Bampton Street.

"Max," exclaimed Mr. Carlyle, raising an accusing forefinger, "you have come on purpose."

"If I have," replied the visitor, "you can reward me with a cup of that excellent beverage that you were able to conjure up from somewhere down in the basement on a former occasion. As a matter of fact, I have."

Mr. Carlyle transmitted the order and then demanded his friend's serious attention.

"That ghost at Massingham Mansions——"

"I still don't believe in that particular ghost, Louis," commented Carrados in mild speculation.

"I never did, of course," replied Carlyle, "but, upon my word, Max, I shall have to very soon as a precautionary measure. Trigget has been able to do nothing and now he has as good as gone on strike."

"Downed—now what on earth can an enquiry man down to go on strike, Louis? Note-books? So Trigget has got a chill, like our candid friend Elliott, eh?"

"He started all right—said that he didn't mind spending a night or a week in a haunted flat, and, to do him justice, I don't believe he did at first. Then he came across a very curious piece of forgotten local history, a very remarkable—er—coincidence in the circumstances, Max."

"I was wondering," said Carrados, "when we should come up against that story, Louis."

"Then you know of it?" exclaimed the enquiry agent in surprise.

"Not at all. Only I guessed it must exist. Here you have the manifestation associated with two things which in themselves are neither usual nor awe-inspiring—the gas and the water. It requires some association to connect them up, to give them point and force. That is the story."

"Yes," assented his friend, "that is the story, and, upon my soul, in the circumstances—well, you shall hear it. It comes partly from the newspapers of many years ago, but only partly, for the circumstances were successfully hushed up in a large measure and it required the stimulated memories of ancient scandalmongers to fill in the details. Oh yes, it was a scandal, Max, and would have been a great sensation too, I do not doubt, only they had no proper pictorial Press in those days, poor beggars. It was very soon after Massingham Mansions had been erected—they were called Enderby House in those days, by the way, for the name was changed on account of this very business. The household at No. 11 consisted of a comfortable, middle-aged married couple and one servant, a quiet and attractive young creature, one is led to understand. As a matter of fact, I think they were the first tenants of that flat."

"The first occupants give the soul to a new house," remarked the blind man gravely. "That is why empty houses have their different characters."

"I don't doubt it for a moment," assented Mr. Carlyle in his incisive way, "but none of our authorities on this case made any reference to the fact. They did say, however, that the man held a good and responsible position—a position for which high personal character and strict morality were essential. He was also well known and regarded in quiet but substantial local circles where serious views prevailed. He was, in short, a man of notorious 'respectability.'

"The first chapter of the tragedy opened with the painful death of the prepossessing handmaiden—suicide, poor creature. She didn't appear one morning and the flat was full of the reek of gas. With great promptitude the master threw all the windows open and called up the porter. They burst open the door of the little bedroom at the end of the passage, and there was the thing as clear as daylight for any coroner's jury to see. The door was locked on the inside and the extinguished gas was turned full on. It was only a tiny room, with no fireplace, and the ventilation of a closed well-fitting door and window was negligible in the circumstances. At all events the girl was proved to have been dead for several hours when

they reached her, and the doctor who conducted the autopsy crowned the convincing fabric of circumstances when he mentioned as delicately as possible that the girl had a very pressing reason for dreading an inevitable misfortune that would shortly overtake her. The jury returned the obvious verdict.

"There have been many undiscovered crimes in the history of mankind, Max, but it is by no means every ingenious plot that carries. After the inquest, at which our gentleman doubtless cut a very proper and impressive figure, the barbed whisper began to insinuate and to grow in freedom. It is sheerly impossible to judge how these things start, but we know that when once they have been begun they gather material like an avalanche. It was remembered by someone at the flat underneath that late on the fatal night a window in the principal bedroom above had been heard to open, top and bottom very quietly. Certain other sounds of movement in the night did not tally with the tale of sleep-wrapped innocence. Sceptical busybodies were anxious to demonstrate practically to those who differed from them on this question that it was quite easy to extinguish a gas-jet in one room by blowing down the gas-pipe in another; and in this connection there was evidence that the lady of the flat had spoken to her friends more than once of her sentimental young servant's extravagant habit of reading herself to sleep occasionally with the light full on. Why was nothing heard at the inquest, they demanded, of the curious fact that an open novelette lay on the counterpane when the room was broken into? A hundred trifling circumstances were adduced—arrangements that the girl had been making for the future down to the last evening of her life—interpretable hints that she had dropped to her acquaintances—her views on suicide and the best means to that end a favourite topic, it would seem, among her class—her possession of certain comparatively expensive trinkets on a salary of a very few shillings a week, and so on. Finally, some rather more definite and important piece of evidence must have been conveyed to the authorities, for we know now that one fine day a warrant was issued. Somehow rumour preceded its execution. The eminently respectable gentleman with whom it was concerned did not wait to argue out the merits of the case. He locked himself in the bathroom, and when the police arrived they found that instead of an arrest they had to arrange the details for another inquest."

"A very convincing episode," conceded Carrados in response to his friend's expectant air. "And now her spirit passes the long winter evenings turning the gas on and off, and the one amusement of his consists in doing the same with the bath-water—or the other way, the other way about, Louis.

Truly, one half the world knows not how the other half lives!"

"All your cheap humour won't induce Trigget to spend another night in that flat, Max," retorted Mr. Carlyle. "Nor, I am afraid, will it help me through this business in any other way."

"Then I'll give you a hint that may," said Carrados. "Try your respectable gentleman's way of settling difficulties."

"What is that?" demanded his friend.

"Blow down the pipes, Louis."

"Blow down the pipes?" repeated Carlyle.

"At all events try it. I infer that Mr. Trigget has not experimented in that direction."

"But what will it do, Max?"

"Possibly it will demonstrate where the other end goes to."

"But the other end goes to the meter."

"I suggest not—not without some interference with its progress. I have already met your Mr. Trigget, you know, Louis. An excellent and reliable man within his limits, but he is at his best posted outside the door of an hotel waiting to see the co-respondent go in. He hasn't enough imagination for this case—not enough to carry him away from what would be his own obvious method of doing it to what is someone else's equally obvious but quite different method. Unless I am doing him an injustice, he will have spent most of his time trying to catch someone getting into the flat to turn the gas and water on and off, whereas I conjecture that no one does go into the flat because it is perfectly simple—ingenious but simple—to produce these phenomena without. Then when Mr. Trigget has satisfied himself that it is physically impossible for anyone to be going in and out, and when, on the top of it, he comes across this romantic tragedy—a tale that might psychologically explain the ghost, simply because the ghost is moulded on the tragedy—then, of course, Mr. Trigget's mental process is swept away from its moorings and his feet begin to get cold."

"This is very curious and suggestive," said Mr. Carlyle. "I certainly assumed——But shall we have Trigget up and question him on the point? I think he ought to be here now—if he isn't detained at the Bull."

Carrados assented, and in a few minutes Mr. Trigget presented himself at the door of the private office. He was a melancholy-looking middle-aged little man, with an ineradicable air of being exactly what he was, and the searcher for deeper or subtler indications of character would only be rewarded by a latent pessimism grounded on the depressing probability that he would never be anything else.

"Come in, Trigget," called out Mr. Carlyle when his employee diffidently appeared. "Come in. Mr. Carrados would

like to hear some of the details of the Massingham Mansion case."

"Not the first time I have availed myself of the benefit o your enquiries, Mr. Trigget," nodded the blind man. "Good afternoon."

"Good-afternoon, sir," replied Trigget with gloomy defer ence. "It's very handsome of you to put it in that way, Mr Carrados, sir. But this isn't another Tarporley-Templeton case if I may say so, sir. That was as plain as a pikestaff after ai sir."

"When we saw the pikestaff, Mr. Trigget; yes, it was," ad mitted Carrados, with a smile. "But this is insoluble? Ah well. When I was a boy I used to be extraordinarily fond o ghost stories, I remember, but even while reading them I a ways had an uneasy suspicion that when it came to the neces sary detail of explaining the mystery I should be defraude with some subterfuge as 'by an ingenious arrangement of hic den wires the artful Muggles had contrived,' etc., or 'an optica illusion effected by means of concealed mirrors revealed th *modus operandi* of the apparition.' I thought that I had bee swindled. I think so still. I hope there are no ingenious wire or concealed mirrors here, Mr. Trigget?"

Mr. Trigget looked mildly sagacious but hopelessly puz zled. It was his misfortune that in him the necessities of h business and the proclivities of his nature were at variance so that he ordinarily presented the curious anomaly of lookin equally alert and tired.

"Wires, sir?" he began, with faint amusement.

"Not only wires, but anything that might account for wha is going on," interposed Mr. Carlyle. "Mr. Carrados mean this, Trigget: you have reported that it is impossible for any one to be concealed in the flat or to have secret access t it——"

"I have tested every inch of space in all the rooms, Mr Carrados, sir," protested the hurt Trigget. "I have examine every board and, you may say, every nail in the floor, th skirting-boards, the window frames and in fact wherever board or a nail exists. There are no secret ways in or ou Then I have taken the most elaborate precautions against th doors and windows being used for surreptitious ingress an egress. They have not been used, sir. For the past week I a the only person who has been in and out of the flat, M Carrados, and yet night after night the gas that is cut off at th meter is lit and turned out again, and the water that is cut o at the cistern splashes about in the bath up to the second I l myself in. Then it's as quiet as the grave and everything exactly as I left it. It isn't human, Mr. Carrados, sir, and flesh

and blood can't stand it—not in the middle of the night, that is to say."

"You see nothing further, Mr. Trigget?"

"I don't indeed, Mr. Carrados. I would suggest doing away with the gas in that room altogether. As a box-room it wouldn't need one."

"And the bathroom?"

"That might be turned into a small bedroom and all the water fittings removed. Then to provide a bathroom——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr. Carlyle impatiently, "but we are retained to discover who is causing this annoyance and to detect the means, not to suggest structural alterations in the flat, Trigget. The fact is that after having put in a week on this job you have failed to bring us an inch nearer its solution. Now Mr. Carrados has suggested"—Mr. Carlyle was not usually detained among the finer shades of humor, but some appreciation of the grotesqueness of the advice required him to control his voice as he put the matter in its baldest form—"Mr. Carrados has suggested that instead of spending the time measuring the chimneys and listening to the wallpaper, you had simply blown down the gas-pipe——"

Carrados was inclined to laugh, although he thought it rather too bad of Louis.

"Not quite in those terms, Mr. Trigget," he interposed.

"Blow down the gas-pipe, sir?" repeated the amazed man. "What for?"

"To ascertain where the other end comes out," replied Carlyle.

"But don't you see, sir, that that is a detail until you ascertain how it is being done? The pipe may be tapped between the bath and the cistern. Naturally, I considered that. As a matter of fact, the water-pipe isn't tapped. It goes straight up from the bath to the cistern in the attic above, a distance of only a few feet, and I have examined it. The gas-pipe, it is true, passes through a number of flats, and without pulling up all the floors it isn't practicable to trace it. But how does that help us, Mr. Carrados? The gas-tap has to be turned on and off; you can't do that with these hidden wires. It has to be lit. I've never heard of lighting gas by optical illusions, sir. Somebody must get in and out of the flat or else it isn't human. I've spent a week, a very trying week, sir, in endeavouring to ascertain how it could be done. I haven't shirked cold and wet and solitude, sir, in the discharge of my duty. I've freely placed my poor gifts of observation and intelligence, such as they are, sir, at the service——"

"Not 'freely,' Trigget," interposed his employer with decision.

"I am speaking under a deep sense of injury, Mr. Carlyle,"

retorted Mr. Trigget, who, having had time to think it over had now come to the conclusion that he was not appreciated "I am alluding to a moral attitude such as we all possess. I am very grieved by what has been suggested. I didn't expec it of you, Mr. Carlyle, sir; indeed I did not. For a week I have done everything that it has been possible to do, everything tha a long experience could suggest, and now, as I understand it sir, you complain that I didn't blow down the gas-pipe, sir It's hard, sir; it's very hard."

"Oh, well, for heaven's sake don't cry about it, Trigget," exclaimed Mr. Carlyle. "You're always sobbing about th place over something or other. We know you did your best—l God help you!" he added aside.

"I did, Mr. Carlyle; indeed I did, sir. And I thank you fo that appreciative tribute to my services. I value it highly, ver highly indeed, sir." A tremulous note in the rather impassione delivery made it increasingly plain that Mr. Trigget's regime had not been confined entirely to solid food that day. Hi wrongs were forgotten and he approached Mr. Carrados wit an engaging air of secrecy.

"What is this tip about blowing down the gas-pipe, sir?" he whispered confidentially. "The old dog's always willing t learn something new."

"Max," said Mr. Carlyle curtly, "is there anything mor that we need detain Trigget for?"

"Just this," replied Carrados after a moment's thought. "Th gas-bracket—it has a mantle attachment on?"

"Oh no, Mr. Carrados," confided the old dog with th affectation of imparting rather valuable information, "not mantle on. Oh, certainly no mantle. Indeed—indeed, not mantle at all."

Mr. Carlyle looked at his friend curiously. It was half ev dent that something might have miscarried. Furthermore, was obvious that the warmth of the room and the stress c emotion were beginning to have a disastrous effect on th level of Mr. Trigget's ideas and speech.

"A globe?" suggested Carrados.

"A globe? No, sir, not even a globe, in the strict sense of th word. No globe, that is to say, Mr. Carrados. In fact nothin like a globe."

"What is there, then?" demanded the blind man witho any break in his unruffled patience. "There may be anothe way—but surely—surely there must be some attachment?"

"No," said Mr. Trigget with precision, "no attachment a all; nothing at all; nothing whatsoever. Just the ordinary c common or penny plain gas-jet, and above it the whayoumay callit thingamabob."

"The shade—gas consumer—of course!" exclaimed Carrados. "That is it."

"The tin thingamabob," insisted Mr. Trigget with slow dignity. "Call it what you will. Its purpose is self-evident. It acts as a dispirator—a distributor, that is to say——"

"Louis," struck in Carrados joyously, "are you good for settling it to-night?"

"Certainly, my dear fellow, if you can really give the time."

"Good; it's years since I last tackled a ghost. What about——?" His look indicated the other member of the council.

"Would he be of any assistance?"

"Perhaps—then."

"What time?"

"Say eleven-thirty."

"Trigget," rapped out his employer sharply, "meet us at the corner of Middlewood and Enderby Roads at half-past eleven sharp to-night. If you can't manage it I shall not require your services again."

"Certainly, sir; I shall not fail to be punctual," replied Trigget without a tremor. The appearance of an almost incredible sobriety had possessed him in the face of warning, and both in speech and manner he was again exactly the man as he had entered the room. "I regard it as a great honour, Mr. Carrados, to be associated with you in this business, sir."

"In the meanwhile," remarked Carrados, "if you find the time hang heavy on your hands you might look up the subject of 'platinum black.' It may be the new tip you want."

"Certainly, sir. But do you mind giving me a hint as to whta 'platinum black' is?"

"It is a chemical that has the remarkable property of igniting hydrogen or coal gas by mere contact," replied Carrados. "Think how useful that may be if you haven't got a match!"

To mark the happy occasion Mr. Carlyle had insisted on taking his friend off to witness a popular musical comedy. Carrados had a few preparations to make, a few accessories to procure for the night's work, but the whole business had come within the compass of an hour and the theatre spanned the interval between dinner at the Palm Tree and the time when they left the car at the appointed meeting-place. Mr. Trigget was already there, in an irreproachable state of normal dejection. Parkinson accompanied the party, bringing with him the baggage of the expedition.

"Anything going on, Trigget?" enquired Mr. Carlyle.

"I've made a turn round the place, sir, and the light was on," was the reply. "I didn't go up for fear of disturbing the conditions before you saw them. That was about ten minutes

ago. Are you going into the yard to look again? I have all th keys, of course."

"Do we, Max?" queried Mr. Carlyle.

"Mr. Trigget might. We need not all go. He can catch u up again."

He caught them up again before they had reached the oute door.

"It's still on, sir," he reported.

"Do we use any special caution, Max?" asked Carlyle.

"Oh, no. Just as though we were friends of the ghost, callin in the ordinary way."

Trigget, who retained the keys, preceded the party up th stairs till the top was reached. He stood a moment at the doo of No. 11 examining, by the light of the electric lamp h carried, his private marks there and pointing out to the other in a whisper that they had not been tampered with. All a once a most dismal wail, lingering, piercing, and ending i something like a sob that died away because the life that gav it utterance had died with it, drawled forebodingly throug the echoing emptiness of the deserted flat. Trigget had ju snapped off his light and in the darkness a startled exclamatio sprang from Mr. Carlyle's lips.

"It's all right, sir," said the little man, with a private sati faction that he had the diplomacy to conceal. "Bit creepy isn't it? Especially when you hear it by yourself up here fo the first time. It's only the end of the bath-water running out.

He had opened the door and was conducting them to th room at the end of the passage. A faint aurora had bee visible from that direction when they first entered the hall, bu it was cut off before they could identify its source.

"That's what happens," muttered Trigget.

He threw open the bedroom door without waiting to e amine his marks there and they crowded into the tiny chan ber. Under the beams of the lamps they carried, it was bri liantly though erratically illuminated. All turned towards th central object of their quest, a tarnished gas-bracket of th plainest description. A few inches above it hung the met disc that Trigget had alluded to, for the ceiling was low ar at that point it was brought even nearer to the gas by co responding with the slant of the roof outside.

With the prescience so habitual with him that it had cease to cause remark among his associates Carrados walked straig to the gas-bracket and touched the burner.

"Still warm," he remarked. "And so are we getting now. thoroughly material ghost, you perceive, Louis."

"But still turned off, don't you see, Mr. Carrados, sir," p in Trigget eagerly. "And yet no one's passed out."

"Still turned off—and still turned on," commented the blind man.

"What do you mean, Max?"

"The small screwdriver, Parkinson," requested Carrados.

"Well, upon my word!" dropped Mr. Carlyle expressively. For in no longer time than it takes to record the fact Max Carrados had removed a screw and then knocked out the tap. He held it up towards them and they all at once saw that so much of the metal had been filed away that the gas passed through no matter how the tap stood. "How on earth did you know of that?"

"Because it wasn't practicable to do the thing in any other way. Now unhook the shade, Parkinson—carefully."

The warning was not altogether unnecessary, for the man had to stand on tiptoes before he could comply. Carrados received the dingy metal cone and lightly touched its inner surface.

"Ah, here, at the apex, to be sure," he remarked. "The gas is bound to get there. And there, Louis, you have an ever-lit and yet a truly 'safety' match—so far as gas is concerned. You can buy the thing for a shilling, I believe."

Mr. Carlyle was examining the tiny apparatus with interest. So small that it might have passed for the mummy of a midge hanging from a cobweb, it appeared to consist of an insignificant black pellet and an inch of the finest wire.

"Um, I've never heard of it. And this will really light the gas?"

"As often as you like. That is the whole bag of tricks."

Mr. Carlyle turned a censorious eye upon his lieutenant, but Trigget was equal to the occasion and met it without embarrassment.

"I hadn't heard of it either, sir," he remarked conversationally. "Gracious, what won't they be getting out next, Mr. Carlyle!"

"Now for the mystery of the water." Carrados was finding his way to the bathroom and they followed him down the passage and across the hall. "In its way I think that this is really more ingenious than the gas, for, as Mr. Trigget has proved for us, the water does not come from the cistern. The taps, you perceive, are absolutely dry."

"It is forced up?" suggested Mr. Carlyle, nodding towards the outlet.

"That is the obvious alternative. We will test it presently." The blind man was down on his hands and knees following the lines of the different pipes. "Two degrees more cold are not conclusive, because in any case the water has gone out that way. Mr. Trigget, you know the ropes, will you be so obliging as to go up to the cistern and turn the water on."

"I shall need a ladder, sir."

"Parkinson."

"We have a folding ladder out here," said Parkinson, touching Mr. Trigget's arm.

"One moment," interposed Carrados, rising from his investigation among the pipes; "this requires some care. I want you to do it without making a sound or showing a light, if that is possible. Parkinson will help you. Wait until you hear us raising a diversion at the other end of the flat. Come, Louis."

The diversion took the form of tapping the wall and skirting-board in the other haunted room. When Trigget presented himself to report that the water was now in, Carrados put him to continue the singular exercise with Mr. Carlyle while he himself slipped back to the bathroom.

"The pump, Parkinson," he commanded in a brisk whisper to his man, who was waiting in the hall.

The appliance was not unlike a powerful tyre pump with some modifications. One tube from it was quickly fitted to the outlet pipe of the bath, another trailed a loose end into the bath itself, ready to take up the water. There were a few other details, the work of moments. Then Carrados turned on the tap, silencing the inflow by the attachment of a short length of rubber tube. When the water had risen a few inches he slipped off to the other room, told his rather mystified confederates there that he wanted a little more noise and bustle put into their performance, and was back again in the bath room.

"Now, Parkinson," he directed, and turned off the tap. There was about a foot of water in the bath.

Parkinson stood on the broad base of the pump and tried to drive down the handle. It scarcely moved.

"Harder," urged Carrados, interpreting every detail of sound with perfect accuracy.

Parkinson set his teeth and lunged again. Again he seemed to come up against a solid wall of resistance.

"Keep trying; something must give," said his master encouragingly. "Here, let me——" He threw his weight into the balance and for a moment they hung like a group poised before action. Then, somewhere, something did give and the sheathing plunger "drew."

"Now like blazes till the bath is empty. Then you can tell the others to stop hammering." Parkinson, looking round to acquiesce, found himself alone, for with silent step and quickened senses Carrados was already passing down the dark flights of the broad stone stairway.

It was perhaps three minutes later when an excited gentleman in the state of disrobement that is tacitly regarded as

falling upon the *punctum cæcum* in times of fire, flood, and nocturnal emergency shot out of the door of No. 7 and bounding up the intervening flights of steps pounded with the knocker on the door of No. 9. As someone did not appear with the instantaneity of a jack-in-the-box, he proceeded to repeat the summons, interspersing it with an occasional "I say!" shouted through the letter-box.

The light above the door made it unconvincing to affect that no one was at home. The gentleman at the door trumpeted the fact through his channel of communication and demanded instant attention. So immersed was he with his own grievance, in fact, that he failed to notice the approach of someone on the other side, and the sudden opening of the door, when it did take place, surprised him on his knees at his neighbour's doorstep, a large and consequential-looking personage as revealed in the light from the hall, wearing the silk hat that he had instinctively snatched up, but with his braces hanging down.

"Mr. Tupworthy of No. 7, isn't it?" quickly interposed the new man before his visitor could speak. "But why this—homage? Permit me to raise you, sir."

"Confound it all," snorted Mr. Tupworthy indignantly, "you're flooding my flat. The water's coming through my bathroom ceiling in bucketfuls. The plaster'll fall next. Can't you stop it. Has a pipe burst or something?"

"Something, I imagine," replied No. 9 with serene detachment. "At all events it appears to be over now."

"So I should hope," was the irate retort. "It's bad enough as it is. I shall go round to the office and complain. I'll tell you what it is, Mr. Belting: these mansions are becoming a pandemonium, sir, a veritable pandemonium."

"Capital idea; we'll go together and complain: two will be more effective," suggested Mr. Belting. "But not to-night, Mr. Tupworthy. We should not find anyone there. The office will be closed. Say to-morrow——"

"I had no intention of anything so preposterous as going there to-night. I am in no condition to go. If I don't get my feet into hot water at once I shall be laid up with a severe cold. Doubtless you haven't noticed it, but I am wet through to the skin, saturated, sir."

Mr. Belting shook his head sagely.

"Always a mistake to try to stop water coming through the ceiling," he remarked. "It will come, you know. Finds its own level and all that."

"I did not try to stop it—at least not voluntarily. A temporary emergency necessitated a slight rearrangement of our accommodations. I—I tell you this in confidence—I was sleeping in the bathroom."

At the revelation of so notable a catastrophe Mr. Belting actually seemed to stagger. Possibly his eyes filled with tears certainly he had to turn and wipe away his emotion before he could proceed.

"Not—not right under it?" he whispered.

"I imagine so," replied Mr. Tupworthy. "I do not conceive that I could have been placed more centrally. I received the full cataract in the region of the ear. Well, if I may rely on you that it has stopped, I will terminate our interview for the present."

"Good-night," responded the still tremulous Belting. "Good night—or good-morning, to be exact." He waited with the door open to light the first flight of stairs for Mr. Tupworthy's descent. Before the door was closed another figure stepped down quietly from the obscurity of the steps leading upwards.

"Mr. Belting, I believe?" said the stranger. "My name is Carrados. I have been looking over the flat above. Can you spare me a few minutes?"

"What, Mr. Max Carrados?"

"The same," smiled the owner of the name.

"Come in, Mr. Carrados," exclaimed Belting, not only without embarrassment, but with positive affection in his voice. "Come in by all means. I've heard of you more than once. Delighted to meet you. This way. I know—I know." He put a hand on his guest's arm and insisted on steering his course until he deposited him in an easy-chair before a fire. "This looks like being a great night. What will you have?"

Carrados put the suggestion aside and raised a corner of the situation.

"I'm afraid that I don't come altogether as a friend," he hinted.

"It's no good," replied his host. "I can't regard you in any other light after this. You heard Tupworthy? But you haven't seen the man, Mr. Carrados. I know—I've heard—but no wealth of the imagination can ever really quite reconstruct Tupworthy, the shoddy magnifico, in his immense porcine complacency, his monumental self-importance. And sleeping right underneath! Gods, but we have lived to-night! Why—why ever did you stop?"

"You associate me with this business?"

"Associate you! My dear Mr. Carrados, I give you the full glorious credit for the one entirely successful piece of low comedy humour in real life that I have ever encountered. Indeed, in a legal and pecuniary sense, I hold you absolutely responsible."

"Oh!" exclaimed Carrados, beginning to laugh quietly. Then he continued: "I think that I shall come through this all right. I shall refer you to Mr. Carlyle, the private enquiry

agent, and he will doubtless pass you on to your landlord, for whom he is acting, and I imagine that he in turn will throw all the responsibility on the ingenious gentleman who has put them to so much trouble. Can you guess the result of my investigation in the flat above?"

"Guess, Mr. Carrados? I don't need to guess: I *know*. You don't suppose I thought for a moment that such transparent devices as two intercepted pipes and an automatic gas-lighter would impose on a man of intelligence? They were only contrived to mystify the credulous imagination of clerks and porters."

"You admit it, then?"

"Admit! Good gracious, of course I admit it, Mr. Carrados. What's the use of denying it?"

"Precisely. I am glad you see that. And yet you seem far from being a mere practical joker. Does your confidence extend to the length of letting me into your object?"

"Between ourselves," replied Mr. Belting, "I haven't the least objection. But I wish that you would have—say a cup of coffee. Mrs. Belting is still up, I believe. She would be charmed to have the opportunity—No? well, just as you like. Now, my object? You must understand, Mr. Carrados, that I am a man of sufficient leisure and adequate means for the small position we maintain. But I am not unoccupied—not idle. On the contrary, I am always busy. I don't approve of any man passing his time aimlessly. I have a number of interests in life—hobbies, if you like. You should appreciate that, as you are a private criminologist. I am—among other things which don't concern us now—a private retributionist. On every side people are becoming far too careless and negligent. An era of irresponsibility has set in. Nobody troubles to keep his word, to carry out literally his undertakings. In my small way I try to set that right by showing them the logical development of their ways. I am, in fact, the sworn enemy of anything approaching sloppiness. You smile at that?"

"It is a point of view," replied Carrados. "I was wondering how the phrase at this moment would convey itself, say, to Mr. Tupworthy's ear."

Mr. Belting doubled up.

"But don't remind me of Tupworthy or I can't get on," he said. "In my method I follow the system of Herbert Spencer towards children. Of course you are familiar with his treatise on 'Education'? If a rough boy persists, after warnings, in tearing or soiling all his clothes, don't scold him for what, after all, is only a natural and healthy instinct overdone. But equally, of course, don't punish yourself by buying him other clothes. When the time comes for the children to be taken to an entertainment little Tommy cannot go with them. It would

not be seemly, and he is too ashamed, to go in rags. He begins to see the force of practical logic. Very well. If a tradesman promises—promises explicitly—delivery of his goods by a certain time and he fails, he finds that he is then unable to leave them. I pay on delivery, by the way. If a man undertakes to make me an article like another—I am painstaking, Mr. Carrados: I point out at the time how exactly like I want it—and it is (as it generally is) on completion something quite different, I decline to be easy-going and to be put off with it. I take the simplest and most obvious instances; I could multiply indefinitely. It is, of course, frequently inconvenient to me, but it establishes a standard."

"I see that you are a dangerous man, Mr. Belting," remarked Carrados. "If most men were like you our national character would be undermined. People would have to behave properly."

"If most men were like me we should constitute an intolerable nuisance," replied Belting seriously. "A necessary reaction towards sloppiness would set in and find me at its head. I am always with minorities."

"And the case in point?"

"The present trouble centres round the kitchen sink. It is cracked and leaks. A trivial cause for so elaborate an outcome, you may say, but you will doubtless remember that two men quarrelling once at a spring as to who should use it first involved half Europe in a war, and the whole tragedy of *Lear* sprang from a silly business round a word. I hadn't noticed the sink when we took this flat, but the landlord had solemnly sworn to do everything that was necessary. Is a new sink necessary to replace a cracked one? Obviously. Well, you know what landlords are: possibly you are one yourself. They promise you heaven until you have signed the agreement and then they tell you to go to hell. Suggested that we'd probably broken the sink ourselves and would certainly be looked to to replace it. An excellent servant caught a cold standing in the drip and left. Was I to be driven into paying for a new sink myself? Very well, I thought, if the reasonable complaint of one tenant is nothing to you, see how you like the unreasonable complaints of fifty. The method served a useful purpose too. When Mrs. Belting heard that old tale about the tragedy at No. 11 she was terribly upset; vowed that she couldn't stay alone in here at night on any consideration.

" 'My dear,' I said, 'don't worry yourself about ghosts. I'll make as good a one as ever lived, and then when you see how it takes other people in, just remember next time you hear of another that someone's pulling the string.' And I really don't think that she'll ever be afraid of ghosts again."

"Thank you," said Carrados, rising. "Altogether I have

spent a very entertaining evening, Mr. Belting. I hope your retaliatory method won't get you into serious trouble this time."

"Why should it?" demanded Belting quickly.

"Oh, well, tenants are complaining, the property is being depreciated. The landlord may think that he has legal redress against you."

"But surely I am at liberty to light the gas or use the bath in my own flat when and how I like?"

A curious look had come into Mr. Belting's smiling face; a curious note must have sounded in his voice. Carrados was warned and, being warned, guessed.

"You are a wonderful man," he said with upraised hand. "I capitulate. Tell me how it is, won't you?"

"I knew the man at No. 11. His tenancy isn't really up till March, but he got an appointment in the north and had to go. His two unexpired months weren't worth troubling about, so I got him to sublet the flat to me—all quite regularly—for a nominal consideration, and not to mention it."

"But he gave up the keys?"

"No. He left them in the door and the porter took them away. Very unwarrantable of him; surely I can keep my keys where I like? However, as I had another. . . . Really, Mr. Carrados, you hardly imagine that unless I had an absolute right to be there I should penetrate into a flat, tamper with the gas and water, knock the place about, tramp up and down ——"

"I go," said Carrados, "to get our people out in haste. Good-night."

"Good-night, Mr. Carrados. It's been a great privilege to meet you. Sorry I can't persuade you . . ."

G. K. Chesterton

THE HAMMER OF GOD

from THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN

Dodd, Mead and Company

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THE LITTLE VILLAGE of Bohun Beacon was perched on a hill so steep that the tall spire of its church seemed only like the peak of a small mountain. At the foot of the church stood a smithy, generally red with fires and always littered with hammers and scraps of iron; opposite to this, over a rude cross of cobbled paths, was "The Blue Boar," the only inn of the place. It was upon this crossway, in the lifting of a leaden and silver daybreak, that two brothers met in the street and spoke; though one was beginning the day and the other finishing it. The Rev. and Hon. Wilfred Bohun was very devout, and was making his way to some austere exercises of prayer or contemplation at dawn. Colonel the Hon. Norman Bohun, his elder brother, was by no means devout, and was sitting in evening dress on the bench outside "The Blue Boar," drinking what the philosophic observer was free to regard either as his last glass on Tuesday or his first on Wednesday. The colonel was not particular.

The Bohuns were one of the very few aristocratic families really dating from the Middle Ages, and their pennon had actually seen Palestine. But it is a great mistake to suppose that such houses stand high in chivalric tradition. Few except the poor preserve traditions. Aristocrats live not in traditions but in fashions. The Bohuns had been Mohocks under Queen Anne and Mashers under Queen Victoria. But like more than one of the really ancient houses, they had rotted in the last two centuries into mere drunkards and dandy degenerates, till there had even come a whisper of insanity. Certainly there was something hardly human about the colonel's wolfish pur-

suit of pleasure, and his chronic resolution not to go hom till morning had a touch of the hideous clarity of insomnia He was a tall, fine animal, elderly, but with a hair still startlin ly yellow. He would have looked merely blond and leonine but his blue eyes were sunk so deep in his face that the looked black. They were a little too close together. He ha very long yellow moustaches; on each side of them a fold o furrow from nostril to jaw, so that a sneer seemed cut int his face. Over his evening clothes he wore a curious pal yellow coat that looked more like a very light dressing-gow than an overcoat, and on the back of his head was stuck a extraordinary broad-brimmed hat of a bright green colour evidently some oriental curiosity caught up at random. He wa proud of appearing in such incongruous attires—proud o the fact that he always made them look congruous.

His brother the curate had also the yellow hair and th elegance, but he was buttoned up to the chin in black, and hi face was clean-shaven, cultivated, and a little nervous. H seemed to live for nothing but his religion; but there wer some who said (notably the blacksmith, who was a Presby terian) that it was a love of Gothic architecture rather tha of God, and that his haunting of the church like a ghost wa only another and purer turn of the almost morbid thirst fo beauty which sent his brother raging after women and win This charge was doubtful, while the man's practical piety wa indubitable. Indeed, the charge was mostly an ignorant mis understanding of the love of solitude and secret prayer, an was founded on his being often found kneeling, not before th altar, but in peculiar places, in the crypts or gallery, or eve in the belfry. He was at the moment about to enter the churc through the yard of the smithy, but stopped and frowned little as he saw his brother's cavernous eyes staring in th same direction. On the hypothesis that the colonel was inte ested in the church he did not waste any speculations. Ther only remained the blacksmith's shop, and though the blac smith was a Puritan and none of his people, Wilfred Bohu had heard some scandals about a beautiful and rather cel brated wife. He flung a suspicious look across the shed, an the colonel stood up laughing to speak to him.

"Good morning, Wilfred," he said. "Like a good landlor I am watching sleeplessly over my people. I am going to ca on the blacksmith."

Wilfred looked at the ground, and said: "The blacksmith out. He is over at Greenford."

"I know," answered the other with silent laughter; "that why I am calling on him."

"Norman," said the cleric, with his eye on a pebble in th road, "are you ever afraid of thunderbolts?"

"What do you mean?" asked the colonel. "Is your hobby meteorology?"

"I mean," said Wilfred, without looking up, "do you ever think that God might strike you in the street?"

"I beg your pardon," said the colonel; "I see your hobby is folk-lore."

"I know your hobby is blasphemy," retorted the religious man, stung in the one live place of his nature. "But if you do not fear God, you have good reason to fear man."

The elder raised his eyebrows politely. "Fear man?" he said.

"Barnes the blacksmith is the biggest and strongest man for forty miles round," said the clergyman sternly. "I know you are no coward or weakling, but he could throw you over the wall."

This struck home, being true, and the lowering line by mouth and nostril darkened and deepened. For a moment he stood with the heavy sneer on his face. But in an instant Colonel Bohun had recovered his own cruel good humour and laughed, showing two dog-like front teeth under his yellow moustache. "In that case, my dear Wilfred," he said quite carelessly, "it was wise for the last of the Bohuns to come out partially in armour."

And he took off the queer round hat covered with green, showing that it was lined within with steel. Wilfred recognised it indeed as a light Japanese or Chinese helmet torn down from a trophy that hung in the old family hall.

"It was the first hat to hand," explained his brother airily; "always the nearest hat—and the nearest woman."

"The blacksmith is away at Greenford," said Wilfred quietly; "the time of his return is unsettled."

And with that he turned and went into the church with bowed head, crossing himself like one who wishes to be quit of an unclean spirit. He was anxious to forget such grossness in the cool twilight of his tall Gothic cloisters; but on that morning it was fated that his still round of religious exercises should be everywhere arrested by small shocks. As he entered the church, hitherto always empty at that hour, a kneeling figure rose hastily to its feet and came towards the full daylight of the doorway. When the curate saw it he stood still with surprise. For the early worshipper was none other than the village idiot, a nephew of the blacksmith, one who neither would nor could care for the church or for anything else. He was always called "Mad Joe," and seemed to have no other name; he was a dark, strong, slouching lad, with a heavy white face, dark straight hair, and a mouth always open. As he passed the priest, his moon-calf countenance gave no hint of what he had been doing or thinking of. He had never been

known to pray before. What sort of prayers was he sayin now? Extraordinary prayers surely.

Wilfred Bohun stood rooted to the spot long enough to se the idiot go out into the sunshine, and even to see his dissolut brother hail him with a sort of avuncular jocularity. The las thing he saw was the colonel throwing pennies at the ope mouth of Joe, with the serious appearance of trying to hit i

This ugly sunlight picture of the stupidity and cruelty of th earth sent the ascetic finally to his prayers for purification an new thoughts. He went up to a pew in the gallery, whic brought him under a coloured window which he loved an always quieted his spirit; a blue window with an angel carry ing lilies. There he began to think less about the half-wit, wit his livid face and mouth like a fish. He began to think less c his evil brother, pacing like a lean lion in his horrible hunge He sank deeper and deeper into those cold and sweet colou of silver blossoms and sapphire sky.

In this place half an hour afterwards he was found b Gibbs, the village cobbler, who had been sent for him in som haste. He got to his feet with promptitude, for he knew tha no small matter would have brought Gibbs into such a plac at all. The cobbler was, as in many villages, an atheist, an his appearance in church was a shade more extraordinary tha Mad Joe's. It was a morning of theological enigmas.

"What is it?" asked Wilfred Bohun rather stiffly, but pu ting out a trembling hand for his hat.

The atheist spoke in a tone that, coming from him, wa quite startlingly respectful, and even, as it were, huskil sympathetic.

"You must excuse me, sir," he said in a hoarse whispe "but we didn't think it right not to let you know at once. I'r afraid a rather dreadful thing has happened, sir. I'm afrai your brother——"

Wilfred clenched his frail hands. "What devilry has h done now?" he cried in involuntary passion.

"Why, sir," said the cobbler, coughing, "I'm afraid he done nothing, and won't do anything. I'm afraid he's done fo You had really better come down, sir."

The curate followed the cobbler down a short winding stai which brought them out at an entrance rather higher than th street. Bohun saw the tragedy in one glance, flat underneat him like a plan. In the yard of the smithy were standing fiv or six men mostly in black, one in an inspector's uniforn They included the doctor, the Presbyterian minister, and th priest from the Roman Catholic chapel, to which the blac smith's wife belonged. The latter was speaking to her, indee very rapidly, in an undertone, as she, a magnificent woma with red-gold hair, was sobbing blindly on a bench. Betwee

these two groups, and just clear of the main heap of hammers, lay a man in evening dress, spread-eagled and flat on his face. From the height above Wilfred could have sworn to every item of his costume and appearance, down to the Bohun rings upon his fingers; but the skull was only a hideous splash, like a star of blackness and blood.

Wilfred Bohun gave but one glance, and ran down the steps into the yard. The doctor, who was the family physician, saluted him, but he scarcely took any notice. He could only stammer out: "My brother is dead. What does it mean? What is this horrible mystery?" There was an unhappy silence; and then the cobbler, the most outspoken man present, answered: "Plenty of horror, sir," he said, "but not much mystery."

"What do you mean?" asked Wilfred, with a white face.

"It's plain enough," answered Gibbs. "There is only one man for forty miles round that could have struck such a blow as that, and he's the man that had most reason to."

"We must not prejudge anything," put in the doctor, a tall, black-bearded man, rather nervously; "but it is competent for me to corroborate what Mr. Gibbs says about the nature of the blow, sir; it is an incredible blow. Mr. Gibbs says that only one man in this district could have done it. I should have said myself that nobody could have done it."

A shudder of superstition went through the slight figure of the curate. "I can hardly understand," he said.

"Mr. Bohun," said the doctor in a low voice, "metaphors literally fail me. It is inadequate to say that the skull was smashed to bits like an egg-shell. Fragments of bone were driven into the body and the ground like bullets into a mud wall. It was the hand of a giant."

He was silent a moment, looking grimly through his glasses; then he added: "The thing has one advantage—that it clears most people of suspicion at one stroke. If you or I or any normally made man in the country were accused of this crime, we should be acquitted as an infant would be acquitted of stealing the Nelson Column."

"That's what I say," repeated the cobbler obstinately; "there's only one man that could have done it, and he's the man that would have done it. Where's Simeon Barnes, the blacksmith?"

"He's over at Greenford," faltered the curate.

"More likely over in France," muttered the cobbler.

"No; he is in neither of those places," said a small and colouriess voice, which came from the little Roman priest who had joined the group. "As a matter of fact, he is coming up the road at this moment."

The little priest was not an interesting man to look at, having stubbly brown hair and a round and stolid face. But if he

had been as splendid as Apollo no one would have looked at him at that moment. Everyone turned round and peered at the pathway which wound across the plain below, along which was indeed walking, at his own huge stride and with a hammer on his shoulder, Simeon the smith. He was a bony and gigantic man, with deep, dark, sinister eyes and a dark chin beard. He was walking and talking quietly with two other men; and though he was never specially cheerful, he seemed quite at his ease.

"My God!" cried the atheistic cobbler, "and there's the hammer he did it with."

"No," said the inspector, a sensible-looking man with a sandy moustache, speaking for the first time. "There's the hammer he did it with over there by the church wall. We have left it and the body exactly as they are."

All glanced round, and the short priest went across and looked down in silence at the tool where it lay. It was one of the smallest and the lightest of the hammers, and would not have caught the eye among the rest; but on the iron edge of it were blood and yellow hair.

After a silence the short priest spoke without looking up, and there was a new note in his dull voice. "Mr. Gibbs was hardly right," he said, "in saying that there is no mystery. There is at least the mystery of why so big a man should attempt so big a blow with so little a hammer."

"Oh, never mind that," cried Gibbs, in a fever. "What are we to do with Simeon Barnes?"

"Leave him alone," said the priest quietly. "He is coming here of himself. I know those two men with him. They are very good fellows from Greenford, and they have come over about the Presbyterian chapel."

Even as he spoke the tall smith swung round the corner of the church, and strode into his own yard. Then he stood there quite still, and the hammer fell from his hand. The inspector who had preserved impenetrable propriety, immediately went up to him.

"I won't ask you, Mr. Barnes," he said, "whether you know anything about what has happened here. You are not bound to say. I hope you don't know, and that you will be able to prove it. But I must go through the form of arresting you in the King's name for the murder of Colonel Norman Bohun."

"You are not bound to say anything," said the cobbler in officious excitement. "They've got to prove everything. They haven't proved yet that it is Colonel Bohun, with the head all smashed up like that."

"That won't wash," said the doctor aside to the priest. "That's out of the detective stories. I was the colonel's medical man, and I knew his body better than he did. He had very fine

hands, but quite peculiar ones. The second and third fingers were the same in length. Oh, that's the colonel right enough."

As he glanced at the brained corpse upon the ground the iron eyes of the motionless blacksmith followed them and rested there also.

"Is Colonel Bohun dead?" said the smith quite calmly.

"Then he's damned."

"Don't say anything! Oh, don't say anything," cried the atheist cobbler, dancing about in an ecstasy of admiration of the English legal system. For no man is such a legalist as the good Secularist.

The blacksmith turned on him over his shoulder the august face of a fanatic.

"It's well for you infidels to dodge like foxes because the world's law favours you," he said; "but God guards His own in His pocket, as you shall see this day."

Then he pointed to the colonel and said: "When did this dog die in his sins?"

"Moderate your language," said the doctor.

"Moderate the Bible's language, and I'll moderate mine. When did he die?"

"I saw him alive at six o'clock this morning," stammered Wilfred Bohun.

"God is good," said the smith. "Mr. Inspector, I have not the slightest objection to being arrested. It is you who may object to arresting me. I don't mind leaving the court without a stain on my character. You do mind, perhaps, leaving the court with a bad set-back in your career."

The solid inspector for the first time looked at the blacksmith with a lively eye; as did everybody else, except the short, strange priest, who was still looking down at the little hammer that had dealt the dreadful blow.

"There are two men standing outside this shop," went on the blacksmith with ponderous lucidity, "good tradesmen in Greenford whom you all know, who will swear that they saw me from before midnight till daybreak and long after in the committee-room of our Revival Mission, which sits all night, we save souls so fast. In Greenford itself twenty people could swear to me for all that time. If I were a heathen, Mr. Inspector, I would let you walk on to your downfall. But as a Christian man I feel bound to give you your chance, and ask you whether you will hear my alibi now or in court."

The inspector seemed for the first time disturbed, and said, "Of course I should be glad to clear you altogether now."

The smith walked out of his yard with the same long and easy stride, and returned to his two friends from Greenford, who were indeed friends of nearly everyone present. Each of them said a few words which no one ever thought of dis-

believing. When they had spoken, the innocence of Simeon stood up as solid as the great church above them.

One of those silences struck the group which are more strange and insufferable than any speech. Madly, in order to make conversation, the curate said to the Catholic priest:

"You seem very much interested in that hammer, Father Brown."

"Yes, I am," said Father Brown; "why is it such a small hammer?"

The doctor swung round on him.

"By George, that's true," he cried; "who would use a little hammer with ten larger hammers lying about?"

Then he lowered his voice in the curate's ear and said: "Only the kind of person that can't lift a large hammer. It is not a question of force or courage between the sexes. It's a question of lifting power in the shoulders. A bold woman could commit ten murders with a light hammer and never turn a hair. She could not kill a beetle with a heavy one."

Wilfred Bohun was staring at him with a sort of hypnotised horror, while Father Brown listened with his head a little on one side, really interested and attentive. The doctor went on with more hissing emphasis:

"Why do these idiots always assume that the only person who hates the wife's lover is the wife's husband? Nine times out of ten the person who most hates the wife's lover is the wife. Who knows what insolence or treachery he had shown her—look there?"

He made a momentary gesture towards the red-haired woman on the bench. She had lifted her head at last and the tears were drying on her splendid face. But the eyes were fixed on the corpse with an electric glare that had in it something of idiocy.

The Rev. Wilfred Bohun made a limp gesture as if waving away all desire to know; but Father Brown, dusting off his sleeve some ashes blown from the furnace, spoke in his indifferent way.

"You are like so many doctors," he said; "your mental science is really suggestive. It is your physical science that is utterly impossible. I agree that the woman wants to kill the co-respondent much more than the petitioner does. And I agree that a woman will always pick up a small hammer instead of a big one. But the difficulty is one of physical impossibility. No woman ever born could have smashed a man's skull out flat like that." Then he added reflectively, after a pause: "These people haven't grasped the whole of it. The man was actually wearing an iron helmet, and the blow scattered it like broken glass. Look at that woman. Look at her arms."

Silence held them all up again, and then the doctor said

rather sulkily: "Well, I may be wrong; there are objections to everything. But I stick to the main point. No man but an idiot would pick up that little hammer if he could use a big hammer."

With that the lean and quivering hands of Wilfred Bohun went up to his head and seemed to clutch his scanty yellow hair. After an instant they dropped, and he cried: "That was the word I wanted; you have said the word."

Then he continued, mastering his discomposure: "The words you said were, 'No man but an idiot would pick up the small hammer.' "

"Yes," said the doctor. "Well?"

"Well," said the curate, "no man but an idiot did." The rest stared at him with eyes arrested and riveted, and he went on in a febrile and feminine agitation.

"I am a priest," he cried unsteadily, "and a priest should be no shedder of blood. I—I mean that he should bring no one to the gallows. And I thank God that I see the criminal clearly now—because he is a criminal who cannot be brought to the gallows."

"You will not denounce him?" enquired the doctor.

"He would not be hanged if I did denounce him," answered Wilfred with a wild but curiously happy smile. "When I went into the church this morning I found a madman praying there—that poor Joe, who has been wrong all his life. God knows what he prayed; but with such strange folk it is not incredible to suppose that their prayers are all upside down. Very likely a lunatic would pray before killing a man. When I last saw poor Joe he was with my brother. My brother was mocking him."

"By Jove!" cried the doctor, "this is talking at last. But how do you explain—"

The Rev. Wilfred was almost trembling with the excitement of his own glimpse of the truth. "Don't you see; don't you see," he cried feverishly; "that is the only theory that covers both the queer things, that answers both the riddles. The two riddles are the little hammer and the big blow. The smith might have struck the big blow, but would not have chosen the little hammer. His wife would have chosen the little hammer, but she could not have struck the big blow. But the madman might have done both. As for the little hammer—why, he was mad and might have picked up anything. And for the big blow, have you never heard, doctor, that a maniac in his paroxysm may have the strength of ten men?"

The doctor drew a deep breath and then said, "By golly, I believe you've got it."

Father Brown had fixed his eyes on the speaker so long

and steadily as to prove that his large grey, ox-like eyes were not quite so insignificant as the rest of his face. When silence had fallen he said with marked respect: "Mr. Bohun, yours is the only theory yet propounded which holds water every way and is essentially unassailable. I think, therefore, that you deserve to be told, on my positive knowledge, that it is not the true one." And with that the old little man walked away and stared again at the hammer.

"That fellow seems to know more than he ought to," whispered the doctor peevishly to Wilfred. "Those popish priests are deucedly sly."

"No, no," said Bohun, with a sort of wild fatigue. "It was the lunatic. It was the lunatic."

The group of the two clerics and the doctor had fallen away from the more official group containing the inspector and the man he had arrested. Now, however, that their own party had broken up, they heard voices from the others. The priest looked up quietly and then looked down again as he heard the blacksmith say in a loud voice:

"I hope I've convinced you, Mr. Inspector. I'm a strong man, as you say, but I couldn't have flung my hammer bang here from Greenford. My hammer hasn't any wings that it should come flying half a mile over hedges and fields."

The inspector laughed amicably and said: "No, I think you can be considered out of it, though it's one of the rummiest coincidences I ever saw. I can only ask you to give us all the assistance you can in finding a man as big and strong as yourself. By George! you might be useful, if only to hold him! I suppose you yourself have no guess at the man?"

"I may have a guess," said the pale smith, "but it is not at a man." Then, seeing the scared eyes turn towards his wife on the bench, he put his huge hand on her shoulder and said "Nor a woman either."

"What do you mean?" asked the inspector jocularly. "You don't think cows use hammers, do you?"

"I think no thing of flesh held that hammer," said the blacksmith in a stifled voice; "mortally speaking, I think the man died alone."

Wilfred made a sudden forward movement and peered at him with burning eyes.

"Do you mean to say, Barnes," came the sharp voice of the cobbler, "that the hammer jumped up of itself and knocked the man down?"

"Oh, you gentlemen may stare and snigger," cried Simeon "you clergymen who tell us on Sunday in what a stillness the Lord smote Sennacherib. I believe that One who walks in visible in every house defended the honour of mine, and laid the defiler dead before the door of it. I believe the forc

in that blow was just the force there is in earthquakes, and no force less."

Wilfred said, with a voice utterly undescribable: "I told Norman myself to beware of the thunderbolt."

"That agent is outside my jurisdiction," said the inspector with a slight smile.

"You are not outside His," answered the smith; "see you to it," and, turning his broad back, he went into the house.

The shaken Wilfred was led away by Father Brown, who had an easy and friendly way with him. "Let us get out of this horrid place, Mr. Bohun," he said. "May I look inside your church? I hear it's one of the oldest in England. We take some interest, you know," he added with a comical grimace, "in old English churches."

Wilfred Bohun did not smile, for humour was never his strong point. But he nodded rather eagerly, being only too ready to explain the Gothic splendours to someone more likely to be sympathetic than the Presbyterian blacksmith or the atheist cobbler.

"By all means," he said; "let us go in at this side." And he led the way into the high side entrance at the top of the flight of steps. Father Brown was mounting the first step to follow him when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to behold the dark, thin figure of the doctor, his face darker yet with suspicion.

"Sir," said the physician harshly, "you appear to know some secrets in this black business. May I ask if you are going to keep them to yourself?"

"Why, doctor," answered the priest, smiling quite pleasantly, "there is one very good reason why a man of my trade should keep things to himself when he is not sure of them, and that is that it is so constantly his duty to keep them to himself when he is sure of them. But if you think I have been discourteously reticent with you or anyone, I will go to the extreme limit of my custom. I will give you two very large hints."

"Well, sir?" said the doctor gloomily.

"First," said Father Brown quietly, "the thing is quite in your own province. It is a matter of physical science. The blacksmith is mistaken, not perhaps in saying that the blow was divine, but certainly in saying that it came by a miracle. It was no miracle, doctor, except in so far as a man is himself a miracle, with his strange and wicked and yet half-heroic heart. The force that smashed that skull was a force well known to scientists—one of the most frequently debated of the laws of nature."

The doctor, who was looking at him with frowning intentness, only said: "And the other hint!"

"The other hint is this," said the priest. "Do you remember the blacksmith, though he believes in miracles, talking scornfully of the impossible fairy tale that his hammer had wings and flew half a mile across country?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "I remember that."

"Well," added Father Brown, with a broad smile, "that fairy tale was the nearest thing to the real truth that has been said to-day." And with that he turned his back and stumped up the steps after the curate.

The Reverend Wilfred, who had been waiting for him, pale and impatient, as if this little delay were the last straw for his nerves, led him immediately to his favourite corner of the church, that part of the gallery closest to the carved roof and lit by the wonderful window with the angel. The little Latin priest explored and admired everything exhaustively, talking cheerfully but in a low voice all the time. When in the course of his investigation he found the side exit and the winding stair down which Wilfred had rushed to find his brother dead, Father Brown ran not down but up, with the agility of a monkey, and his clear voice came from an outer platform above.

"Come up here, Mr. Bohun," he called. "The air will do you good."

Bohun followed him, and came out on a kind of stone gallery or balcony outside the building, from which one could see the illimitable plain in which their small hill stood, wooded away to the purple horizon and dotted with villages and farms. Clear and square, but quite small beneath them, was the blacksmith's yard, where the inspector still stood taking notes and the corpse still lay like a smashed fly.

"Might be the map of the world, mightn't it?" said Father Brown.

"Yes," said Bohun very gravely, and nodded his head.

Immediately beneath and about them the lines of the Gothic building plunged outwards into the void with a sickening swiftness akin to suicide. There is that element of Titan energy in the architecture of the Middle Ages, that, from whatever aspect it be seen, it always seems to be rushing away, like the strong back of some maddened horse. This church was hewn out of ancient and silent stone, bearded with old fungoids and stained with the nests of birds. And yet, when they saw it from below, it sprang like a fountain at the stars; and when they saw it, as now, from above, it poured like a cataract into a voiceless pit. For these two men on the tower were left alone with the most terrible aspect of the Gothic; the monstrous foreshortening and disproportion, the dizzy perspectives, the glimpses of great things small and small things great; a topsy-turvydom of stone in the mid-air. Details of

stone, enormous by their proximity, were relieved against a pattern of fields and farms, pygmy in their distance. A carved bird or beast at a corner seemed like some vast walking or flying dragon wasting the pastures and villages below. The whole atmosphere was dizzy and dangerous, as if men were upheld in air amid the gyrating wings of colossal genii; and the whole of that old church, as tall and rich as a cathedral, seemed to sit upon the sunlit country like a cloud-burst.

"I think there is something rather dangerous about standing on these high places even to pray," said Father Brown. "Heights were made to be looked at, not to be looked from."

"Do you mean that one may fall over?" asked Wilfred.

"I mean that one's soul may fall if one's body doesn't." said the other priest.

"I scarcely understand you," remarked Bohun indistinctly.

"Look at that blacksmith, for instance," went on Father Brown calmly; "a good man, but not a Christian—hard, imperious, unforgiving. Well, his Scotch religion was made up by men who prayed on hills and high crags, and learnt to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven. Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak."

"But he—he didn't do it," said Bohun tremulously.

"No," said the other in an odd voice; "we know he didn't do it."

After a moment he resumed, looking tranquilly out over the plain with his pale grey eyes. "I knew a man," he said, "who began by worshipping with others before the altar, but who grew fond of high and lonely places to pray from, corners or niches in the belfry or the spire. And once in one of those dizzy places, where the whole world seemed to turn under him like a wheel, his brain turned also, and he fancied he was God. So that though he was a good man, he committed a great crime."

Wilfred's face was turned away, but his bony hands turned blue and white as they tightened on the parapet of stone.

"He thought it was given to *him* to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor. But he saw all men walking about like insects. He saw one especially strutting just below him, insolent and evident by the bright green hat—a poisonous insect."

Rooks cawed round the corners of the belfry; but there was no other sound till Father Brown went on.

"This also tempted him, that he had in his hand one of the most awful engines of nature; I mean gravitation, that mad and quickening rush by which all earth's creatures fly back to her heart when released. See, the inspector is strutting

just below us in the smithy. If I were to toss a pebble over this parapet it would be something like a bullet by the time it struck him. If I were to drop a hammer—even a small hammer——"

Wilfred Bohun threw one leg over the parapet, and Father Brown had him in a minute by the collar.

"Not by that door," he said quite gently; "that door leads to hell."

Bohun staggered back against the wall, and stared at him with frightful eyes.

"How do you know all this?" he cried. "Are you a devil?"

"I am a man," answered Father Brown gravely; "and therefore have all devils in my heart. Listen to me," he said after a short pause. "I know what you did—at least, I can guess the great part of it. When you left your brother you were racked with no unrighteous rage to the extent even that you snatched up a small hammer, half inclined to kill him with his foulness on his mouth. Recoiling, you thrust it under your buttoned coat instead, and rushed into the church. You pray wildly in many places, under the angel window, upon the platform above, and on a higher platform still, from which you could see the colonel's Eastern hat like the back of a green beetle crawling about. Then something snapped in your soul, and you let God's thunderbolt fall."

Wilfred put a weak hand to his head, and asked in a low voice: "How did you know that his hat looked like a green beetle?"

"Oh, that," said the other with the shadow of a smile, "that was common sense. But hear me further. I say I know all this; but no one else shall know it. The next step is for you; I shall take no more steps; I will seal this with the seal of confession. If you ask me why, there are many reasons, and only one that concerns you. I leave things to you because you have not yet gone very far wrong, as assassins go. You did not help to fix the crime on the smith when it was easy; or on his wife, when that was easy. You tried to fix it on the imbecile because you knew that he could not suffer. That was one of the gleams that it is my business to find in assassins. And now come down into the village, and go your own way as free as the wind; for I have said my last word."

They went down the winding stairs in utter silence, and came out into the sunlight by the smithy. Wilfred Bohun carefully unlatched the wooden gate of the yard, and going up to the inspector, said: "I wish to give myself up; I have killed my brother."

E. W. Hornung

THE WRONG HOUSE

from RAFFLES

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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MY BROTHER RALPH, who now lived with me on the edge of Ham Common, had come home from Australia with a curious affection of the eyes, due to long exposure to the glare out there, and necessitating the use of clouded spectacles in the open air. He had not the rich complexion of the typical colonist, being indeed peculiarly pale, but it appeared that he had been confined to his berth for the greater part of the voyage, while his prematurely grey hair was sufficient proof that the rigours of bush life had at last undermined an originally tough constitution. Our landlady, who spoilt my brother from the first, was much concerned on his behalf, and wished to call in the local doctor; but Ralph said dreadful things about the profession, and quite frightened the good woman by arbitrarily forbidding her ever to let a doctor inside her door. I had to apologise to her for the painful prejudices and violent language of "these colonists," but the old soul was easily mollified. She had fallen in love with my brother at first sight, and she never could do too much for him. It was owing to our landlady that I took to calling him Ralph, for the first time in our lives, on her beginning to speak of and to him as "Mr. Raffles."

"This won't do," said he to me. "It's a name that sticks."

"It must be my fault! She must have heard it from me," said I self-reproachfully.

"You must tell her it's the short for Ralph."

"But it's longer."

"It's the short," said he; "and you've got to tell her so."

Henceforth I heard as much of "Mr. Ralph," his likes and his dislikes, what he would fancy and what he would not, and ah, what a dear gentleman he was, that I often remembered to say, "Ralph, old chap," myself.

It was an ideal cottage, as I said when I found it, and in it our delicate man became rapidly robust. Not that the air was also ideal, for, when it was not raining, we had the same faithful mist from November to March. But it was something to Ralph to get any air at all, other than night air, and the bicycle did the rest. We taught ourselves, and may I never forget our earlier rides, through and through Richmond Park when the afternoons were shortest, upon the incomparable Ripley Road when we gave a day to it. Raffles rode a Beeston Humber, a Royal Sunbeam was good enough for me, but he insisted on our both having Dunlop tyres.

"They seem the most popular brand. I had my eye on the road all the way from Ripley to Cobham, and there were more Dunlop marks than any other kind. Bless you, yes, they all leave their special tracks, and we don't want ours to be extra special; the Dunlop's like a rattlesnake, and the Palmer leaves telegraph-wires, but surely the serpent is more in our line."

That was the winter when there were so many burglaries in the Thames Valley from Richmond upward. It was said that the thieves used bicycles in every case, but what is not said? They were sometimes on foot to my knowledge, and we took a great interest in the series, or rather sequence of successful crimes. Raffles would often get his devoted old lady to read him the latest local accounts, while I was busy with my writing (much I wrote) in my own rooms.

We even rode out by night ourselves, to see if we could not get on the tracks of the thieves, and never did we fail to find hot coffee on the hob for our return. We had indeed fallen upon our feet. Also, the misty nights might have been made for the thieves. But their success was not so consistent, and never so enormous, as people said, especially the sufferers, who lost more valuables than they had ever been known to possess. Failure was often the caitiff's portion, and disaster once; owing, ironically enough, to that very mist which should have served them. But as I am going to tell the story with some particularity, and perhaps some gusto, you will see why, who read.

The right house stood on high ground near the river, with quite a drive (in at one gate and out at the other) sweeping past the steps. Between the two gates was a half-moon of shrubs, to the left of the steps a conservatory, and to their right the walk leading to the tradesmen's entrance and the back

premises; here also was the pantry window, of which more anon. The right house was the residence of an opulent stockbroker who wore a heavy watch-chain and seemed fair game. There would have been two objections to it had I been the stockbroker. The house was one of a row, though a goodly row, and an army-crammer had established himself next door. There is a type of such institutions in the suburbs; the youths go about in knickerbockers, smoking pipes, except on Saturday nights, when they lead each other home from the last train. It was none of our business to spy upon these boys, but their manners and customs fell within the field of observation. And we did not choose the night upon which the whole row was likely to be kept awake.

The night that we did choose was as misty as even the Thames Valley is capable of making them. Raffles smeared vaseline over the plated parts of his Beeston Humber before starting, and our dear landlady cosseted us both, and prayed we might see nothing of the nasty burglars, not denying us the reward would be very handy to them that got it, to say nothing of the honour and glory. We had promised her a liberal perquisite in the event of our success, but she must not give other cyclists our idea by mentioning it to a soul. It was about midnight when we cycled through Kingston to Surbiton, having trundled our machines across Ham Fields, mournful in the mists as those by Acheron, and so over Teddington Bridge.

I often wonder why the pantry window is the vulnerable point of nine houses out of ten. This house of ours was almost the tenth, for the window in question had bars of sorts, but not the right sort. The only bars that Raffles allowed to beat him were the kind that are let into the stone outside; those fixed within are merely screwed to the woodwork, and you can unscrew as many as necessary if you take the trouble and have the time. Barred windows are usually devoid of other fasteners worthy the name; this one was no exception to that foolish rule, and a push with the penknife did its business. I am giving householders some valuable hints, and perhaps deserving a good mark from the critics. These, in any case, are the points that I would see to, were I a rich stockholder in a riverside suburb. In giving good advice, however, I should not have omitted to say that we had left our machines in the semicircular shrubbery in front, or that Raffles had most ingeniously fitted our lamps with dark slides, which enabled us to leave them burning.

It proved sufficient to unscrew the bars at the bottom only, and then to wrench them to either side. Neither of us had grown stout with advancing years, and in a few minutes we had both wormed through into the sink, and thence to the

floor. It was not an absolutely noiseless process, but once in the pantry we were mice, and no longer blind mice. There was a gas-bracket, but we did not meddle with that. Raffles went armed these nights with a better light than gas; if it were not immoral, I might recommend a dark-lantern which was more or less his patent. It was that handy invention, the electric torch, fitted by Raffles with a dark hood to fulfill the functions of a slide. I had held it through the bars while he undid the screws, and now he held it to the keyhole, in which a key was turned upon the other side.

There was a pause for consideration, and in the pause we put on our masks. It was never known that these Thames Valley robberies were all committed by miscreants decked in the livery of crime, but that was because until this night we had never even shown our masks. It was a point upon which Raffles had insisted on all feasible occasions since his furtive return to the world. To-night it twice nearly lost us everything—but you shall hear.

There is a forceps for turning keys from the wrong side of the door, but the implement is not so easy of manipulation as it might be. Raffles for one preferred a sharp knife and the corner of the panel. You go through the panel because that is thinnest, of course in the corner nearest the key, and you use a knife when you can, because it makes the least noise. But it does take minutes, and even I can remember shifting the electric torch from one hand to the other, before the aperture was large enough to receive the hand and wrist of Raffles.

He had at such times a motto of which I might have made earlier use, but the fact is that I have only once before described a downright burglary in which I assisted, and that without knowing it at the time. The most solemn student of these annals, cannot affirm that he has cut through many doors in our company, since (what was to me) the maiden effort to which I allude. I, however, have cracked only too many a crib in conjunction with A. J. Raffles, and at the crucial moment he would whisper "Victory or Wormwood Scrubbs, Bunny!" or instead of Wormwood Scrubbs it might be Portland Bill. This time it was neither one nor the other, for with that very word "victory" upon his lips, they whitened and parted with the first taste of defeat.

"My hand's held!" gasped Raffles, and the white of his eyes showed all round the iris, a rarer thing than you may think.

At the same moment I heard the shuffling feet and the low excited young voices on the other side of the door, and a faint light shone round Raffles's wrist.

"Well done, Beefy!"

"Hang on to him!"

"Good old Beefy!"

"Beefy's got him!"

"So have I—so have I!"

And Raffles caught my arm with his one free hand. "They've got me tight," he whispered. "I'm done."

"Blaze through the door," I urged, and might have done it had I been armed. But I never was. It was Raffles who monopolised that risk.

"I can't—it's the boys—the wrong house!" he whispered. "Curse the fog—it's done me. But you get out, Bunny, while you can; never mind me; it's my turn, old chap."

His one hand tightened in affectionate farewell. I put the electric torch in it before I went, trembling in every inch, but without a word.

Get out! His turn! Yes, I would get out, but only to come in again, for it was my turn—mine—not his. Would Raffles have me held by a hand through a hole in a door? What he would have done in my place was the thing for me to do now. I began by diving head first through the pantry window and coming to earth upon all fours. But even as I stood up, and brushed the gravel from the palms of my hands and the knees of my knickerbockers, I had no notion what to do next. And yet I was half-way to the front door before I remembered the vile crape mask upon my face, and tore it off as the door flew open, and my feet were on the steps.

"He's into the next garden," I cried to a bevy of pyjamas with bare feet and young faces at either end of them.

"Who? Who?" said they giving way before me.

"Some fellow who came through one of your windows head first."

"The other Johnny, the other Johnny," the cherubs chorused.

"Biking past—saw the light—why, what have you there?"

Of course it was Raffles's hand that they had, but now I was in the hall among them. A red-faced barrel of a boy did all the holding, one hand round the wrist, the other palm to palm, and his knees braced up against the panel. Another was rendering ostentatious but ineffectual aid, and three or four others danced about in their pyjamas. After all, they were not more than four to one. I had raised my voice, so that Raffles might hear me and take heart, and now I raised it again. Yet to this day I cannot account for my inspiration, that proved nothing less.

"Don't talk so loud," they were crying below their breath; "don't wake 'em upstairs, this is our show."

"Then I see you've got one of them," said I as desired.

"Well, if you want the other you can have him too. I believe he's hurt himself."

"After him, after him!" they exclaimed as one.

"But I think he got over the wall——"

"Come on, you chaps, come on!"

And there was a soft stampede to the hall door.

"Don't all desert me, I say!" gasped the red-faced hero who held Raffles prisoner.

"We must have them both, Beefy!"

"That's all very well——"

"Look here," I interposed, "I'll stay by you. I've a friend outside, I'll get him too."

"Thanks awfully," said the valiant Beefy. The hall was empty now. My heart beat high.

"How did you hear them?" I inquired, my eye running over him.

"We were down having drinks—game o'nap—in there."

Beefy jerked his great head towards an open door, and the tail of my eye caught the glint of glasses in the firelight, but the rest of it was otherwise engaged.

"Let me relieve you," I said, trembling.

"No, I'm all right."

"Then I must insist."

And before he could answer, I had him round the neck with such a will that not a gurgle passed my fingers, for they were almost buried in his hot smooth flesh. Oh, I am not proud of it; the act was as vile as act could be; but I was not going to see Raffles taken, my one desire was to be the saving of him, and I tremble even now to think to what lengths I might have gone for its fulfilment. As it was I squeezed and tugged until one strong hand gave way after the other and came feeling round for me, but feebly because they had held on so long. And what do you suppose was happening at the same moment? The pinched white hand of Raffles, reddening with the returning blood, and with a clot of blood upon the wrist, was craning upward and turning the key in the lock without a moment's loss.

"Steady on, Bunny!"

And I saw that Beefy's ears were blue; but Raffles was feeling in his pockets as he spoke. "Now let him breathe," said he, clapping his handkerchief over the poor youth's mouth. An empty phial was in his other hand, and the first few stertorous breaths that the poor boy took were the end of him for the time being.

Oh, but it was villainous, my part especially, for he must have been far gone to go the rest of the way so readily. I began by saying I was not proud of this deed, but its dastardly character has come home to me more than ever with the

penance of writing it out. I see in myself, at least my then self, things that I never saw quite so clearly before. Yet let me be quite sure that I would not do the same again. I had not the smallest desire to throttle this innocent lad (nor did I), but only to extricate Raffles from the most hopeless position he was ever in; and after all it was better than a blow from behind. On the whole, I will not alter a word, nor whine about the thing any more.

We lifted the plucky fellow into Raffles's place in the pantry, locked the door on him, and put the key through the panel. Now was the moment for thinking of ourselves, and again that infernal mask which Raffles swore by, came near the undoing of us both. We had reached the steps when we were hailed by a voice, not from without but from within, and I had just time to tear the accursed thing from Raffles's face before he turned.

A stout man with a blond moustache was on the stairs, in his pyjamas like the boys.

"What are you doing here?" said he.

"There has been an attempt upon your house," said I, still spokesman for the night, and still on the wings of inspiration.

"Your sons—"

"My pupils."

"Indeed. Well, they heard it, drove off the thieves, and have given chase."

"And where do you come in?" enquired the stout man, descending.

"We were bicycling past, and I actually saw one fellow come head first through your pantry window. I think he got over the wall."

Here a breathless boy returned.

"Can't see anything of him," he gasped.

"It's true, then," remarked the crammer.

"Look at that door," said I.

But unfortunately the breathless boy looked also, and now he was being joined by others equally short of wind.

"Where's Beefy?" he screamed. "What on earth's happened to Beefy?"

"My good boys," exclaimed the crammer, "will one of you be kind enough to tell me what you've been doing, and what these gentlemen have been doing for you? Come in all, before you get your death. I see lights in the class-room, and more than lights. Can these be signs of a carouse?"

"A very innocent one, sir," said a well-set-up youth with more moustache than I have yet.

"Well, Olphert, boys will be boys. Suppose you tell me what happened, before we come to recriminations."

The bad old proverb was my first warning. I caught two

of the youths exchanging glances under raised eye-brows. Yet their stout easy-going mentor had given me such a reassuring glance of sidelong humour, as between man of the world and man of the world, that it was difficult to suspect him of suspicion. I was nevertheless itching to be gone.

Young Olphert told his story with engaging candour. It was true that they had come down for an hour's nap and cigarettes; well, and there was no denying that was whisky in the glasses. The boys were now all back in their class-room, I think entirely for the sake of warmth; but Raffles and I were in knickerbockers and Norfolk jackets, and very naturally remained without, while the army-crammer (who wore bedroom slippers) stood on the threshold, with an eye each way. The more I saw of the man the better I liked and the more I feared him. His chief annoyance thus far was, that they had not called him when they heard the noise, that they had dreamt of leaving him out of the fun. But he seemed more hurt than angry about that.

"Well, sir," concluded Olphert, "we left old Beefy Smith hanging on to his hand, and this gentleman with him, so perhaps he can tell us what happened next?"

"I wish I could," I cried, with all their eyes upon me, for I had had time to think. "Some of you must have heard me say I'd fetch my friend in from the road?"

"Yes, I did," piped an innocent from within.

"Well, and when I came back with him things were exactly as you see them now. Evidently the man's strength was too much for the boy's; but whether he ran upstairs or outside, I know no more than you do."

"It wasn't like that boy to run either way," said the crammer, cocking a clear blue eye on me.

"But if he gave chase!"

"It wasn't like him even to let go."

"I don't believe Beefy ever would," put in Olphert. "That's why we gave him the billet."

"He may have followed him through the pantry window," I suggested wildly.

"I'll have a look at it," said the crammer.

And the key no longer in the lock, and the insensible youth within! The key would be missed, the door kicked in; nay, with the man's eye still upon me, I thought I could smell chloroform, I thought I could hear a moan, and prepared for either any moment. And how he did stare! I have detested blue eyes ever since, and blonde moustaches, and the whole stout easy-going type that is not such a fool as it looks. I had brazened it out with the boys, but the first grown man was too many for me, and the blood ran out of my heart as though there was no Raffles at my back. Indeed, I had forgotten him. I

had so longed to put this thing through by myself! Even in my extremity it was almost a disappointment to me, when his dear cool voice fell like a delicious draught upon my ears. But its effect upon the others is more interesting to recall. Until now the crammer had the centre of the stage, but at this point Raffles usurped a place which was always his at will. People would wait for what he had to say, as these people waited now for the simplest and most natural thing in the world.

"One moment!" he had begun.

"Well?" said the crammer, relieving me of his eyes at last.

"I don't want to lose any of the fun——"

"Nor must you," said the crammer, with emphasis.

"But we've left our bikes outside, and mine's a Beeston Humber," continued Raffles. "If you don't mind, we'll bring 'em in before these fellows get away on them."

And out he went without a look to see the effect of his words, I after him with a determined imitation of his self-control. But I would have given something to turn round. I believe that for one moment the shrewd instructor was taken in, but as I reached the steps I heard him asking his pupils whether any of them had seen any bicycles outside.

That moment, however, made the difference. We were in the shrubbery, Raffles with his electric torch drawn and blazing, when we heard them kicking at the pantry-door, and in the drive with our bicycles before man and boys poured pell-mell down the steps.

We rushed our machines to the nearer gate, for both were shut, and we got through and swung it home behind us in the nick of time. Even I could mount before they could reopen the gate, which Raffles held against them for half an instant with unnecessary gallantry. But he would see me in front of him, and so it fell to me to lead the way.

Now, I have said that it was a very misty night (hence the whole thing) and also that these houses were on a hill. But they were not nearly on the top of the hill, and I did what I firmly believe that almost everybody would have done in my place. Raffles, indeed, said he would have done it himself, but that was his generosity, and he was the one man who would not. What I did was to turn in the opposite direction to the other gate, where we might so easily have been cut off, and to pedal for my life—up-hill!

"My God!" I shouted when I found it out.

"Can you turn in your own length?" asked Raffles, following loyally.

"Not certain."

"Then stick to it. You couldn't help it. But it's the devil of a hill!"

"And here they come!"

"Let them," said Raffles, and brandished his electric torch, our only light as yet.

A hill seems endless in the dark, for you cannot see the end, and with the patter of bare feet gaining on us, I thought this one could have no end at all. Of course the boys could charge up it quicker than we could pedal, but I even heard the voice of their stout instructor growing louder through the mist.

"Oh, to think I've let you in for this!" I groaned, my head over the handle-bars, every ounce of my weight first on one foot and then on the other. I glanced at Raffles, and in the white light of his torch he was doing it all with his ankles, exactly as though he had been riding in a Gymkhana.

"It's the most sporting chase I was ever in," said he.

"All my fault!"

"My dear Bunny, I wouldn't have missed it for the world!"

Nor would he forge ahead of me, though he could have done so in a moment, he who from his boyhood, had done everything of the kind so much better than anybody else. No, he must ride a wheel's length behind me, and now we could not only hear the boys running, but breathing also. And then of a sudden I saw Raffles on my right striking with his torch; a face flew out of the darkness to meet the thick glass bulb with the glowing wire enclosed; it was the face of the boy Olphert, with his enviable moustache, but it vanished with the crash of glass, and the naked wire thickened to the eye like a tuning-fork struck red-hot.

I saw no more of that. One of them had crept up on my side also; as I looked, hearing him pant, he was grabbing at my left handle, and I nearly sent Raffles into the hedge by the sharp turn I took to the right. His wheel's length saved him. But my boy could run, was overhauling me again, seemed certain of me this time, when all at once the Sunbeam ran easily; every ounce of my weight with either foot once more, and I was over the crest of the hill, the grey road reeling out from under me as I felt for my brake. I looked back at Raffles. He had put up his feet. I screwed my head round still farther, and there were the boys in their pyjamas, their hands upon their knees, like so many wicket-keepers, and a big man shaking his first. There was a lamp-post on the hill-top, and that was the last I saw.

We sailed down to the river, then on through Thames Ditton as far as Esher station, when we turned sharp to the right, and from the dark stretch by Imber Court came to light in Molesey, and were soon pedalling like gentlemen of leisure through Bushey Park, our lights turned up, the broken torch put out and away. The big gates had long been shut, but you

can manœuvre a bicycle through the others. We had no further adventures on the way home, and our coffee was still warm upon the hob.

"But I think it's an occasion for Sullivans," said Raffles, who now kept them for such. "By all my gods, Bunny, it's been the most sporting night we ever had in our lives! And do you know which was the most sporting part of it?"

"That up-hill ride!"

"I wasn't thinking of it."

"Turning your torch into a truncheon?"

"My dear Bunny! A gallant lad—I hated hitting him."

"I know," I said. "The way you got us out of the house!"

"No, Bunny," said Raffles, blowing rings. "It came before that, you sinner, and you know it!"

"You don't mean anything I did?" said I, self-consciously, for I began to see that this was what he did mean. And now at last it will also be seen why this story has been told with undue and inexcusable gusto; there is none other like it for me to tell; it is my one ewe-lamb in all these annals. But Raffles had a ruder name for it.

"It was the Apotheosis of the Bunny," said he, but in a tone I never shall forget.

"I hardly knew what I was doing or saying," I said. "The whole thing was a fluke."

"Then," said Raffles, "it was the kind of fluke I always trusted you to make when runs were wanted."

And he held out his dear old hand.

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